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THE
NIEBELUNGS



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PART I

The Horned Siegfried

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PROLOGUE
IN ONE ACT

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

King Gunther

Hagen Tronje

Dankwart, his Brother

Volker, the Fiddler

Giselher, } Brothers of the King
Gererot, }

Rumolt, Head of the Kitchen Department

Siegfried

Ute, King Dankwart's Widow

Kriemhild, her Daughter

Knights, People



[Burgundy, Worms on the Rhine. King Gunther's Castle. Great Hall. Early Morning. Gunther, Giselher, Gerenot, Dankwart, Volker the Fiddler, and other Knights are assembled]

SCENE I

[Hagen Tronje enters]

Hagen

No hunt to-day?

Gunther

But it's a holiday.

Hagen

Were but the chaplain taken by that Satan
Of whom he prates!

Gunther

Hey, Hagen, keep thy temper.

Hagen

What is't to-day? Born He was long ago!
That was—let's see!—Yes, in the winter time.
A bear hunt did his feast then spoil for us!

Giselher

Whom means our uncle?

Hagen

He's also crucified,
And dead, and buried—or is it not so?

Gerenot

He's speaking of the Saviour.

Hagen

Is't not over?
Who holds with me? I eat no meat to-night
That until midday sticks not in its skin,
Nor will I drink my wine, but from the horn
That from the ure ox I have first to take.

Gunther

Then wilt thou have but fish to chew, my friend;
We do not go to hunt on Easter morn.

Hagen

What do we, then? Where is the holy man?
What is permitted? Hark! the birds are whistling
Then surely we may be allowed some fiddling.

(to *Volker*)

So, fiddle thou until the last cord breaks!

Volker

I do not fiddle while the sun is shining,
That cheerful work I save up for the night.

Hagen

Yes. Thou would'st even then use on thy fiddle
As cords the en'my's bowels, and as bow
One of his bones!

Volker

And would'st thyself, perhaps,
On this condition be a player too?

Hagen

I know thee, Volker mine. Is it not so?
Thou only speakest, when thou canst not fiddle,
And fiddlest only, when thou canst not fight.

Volker

That may be so.

Gunther

Give us a tale, the day
Else lasts too long. Thou knowest many things
Of strongest knights, and proudest ladies too.

Hagen

Nought but of living ones, I prithee grant,
That one may tell one's self: I'll get them yet—
Him for my sword, and she into my arm.

Volker

I will tell thee a tale of some that live,
And yet that thought will never come to thee.
I know the knight that thou wilt never challenge,
Also the woman thou wilt never woo.

Hagen

How ! And the woman ? For the knight I let pass,
But who is she ? Thou mean'st the dragon killer
That owneth Balmung, he, the horned Siegfried,
Who, after having once poured out his sweat,
Did by the bath preclude the second time—
But who's the woman ?

Volker

I'll say nought of her !
I fear thou might'st go forth to seek the bride,
And certainly would'st not come home with her.
The dragon killer even will consider
Ere he, as wooer, knocks at Brunhild's door.

Hagen

Well, that which Siegfried dares, I will dare too.
Only against him draw I not my sword,
For that would be as against stone and iron.
Believe or doubt it, just as you may please :
I never would have bathed in dragon's blood,
For may he fight yet, who can never fall.

Giseler (to Volker)

A thousand tongues I've heard about him gabble,
But as the birds confusedly do twitter,
It made no song. Do thou once speak of him.

Gunther

First, of the woman speak. What woman is she ?

Volker

In deepest North, where the night never endeth,
And where the light, 'neath which they amber fish,
And slay the seal, doth not come from the sun,
No, from the ball of fire in the moor—

[Trumpet blasts in the distance]

Hagen

Hark ! Trumpets.

Gunther

Well ?

Volker

There, did a Prince's child
Grow up, of such amazing beauty, so unique,
As had but nature from its first beginning
Saved thriftily for her, and had to all
Refused the highest charm that graces woman
But to endow her with its full enchantment.

The
Nibelungs

Thou know'st of Runic letters, that mysterious
In darkest nights, and then, by unknown hands
Are deep engraved upon some forest trees ;
He who beholdeth them ne'er more can go,
He thinks and thinks, and wonders what they mean,
And ne'er has done ; his sword glides from his grasp,
His hair turns grey, he dies and still does muse !
Such Runic letters in her face appear !

Gunther

How, Volker ? And the world holds such a woman
And I but now hear of it ?

Volker

Hear yet more.
'Tis so. Midst ice and snow, an eye's delight
But to the sharks and whales, beneath a sky
That cannot even light her beauty up,
But that a mountain out of subterranean
Abysses sometimes sends a lightning red,
The loveliest of all maidens has grown up ;
But yet the noble land that saw her born
Is also jealous of its only treasure
And guards her with such envious, trembling fear,
As if it did expect in the same moment
That she is led unto her bridal bed.
The sea might swallow it, that roars around,
She lives in flaming castle, and the way
To it is guarded by the tribe of dwarfs—
The quickly grasping, squeezing, strangling ones,
Who all obey the savage Alberich ;
And then, besides, she's gifted with such powers,
That they would even put to shame a hero.

Gunther

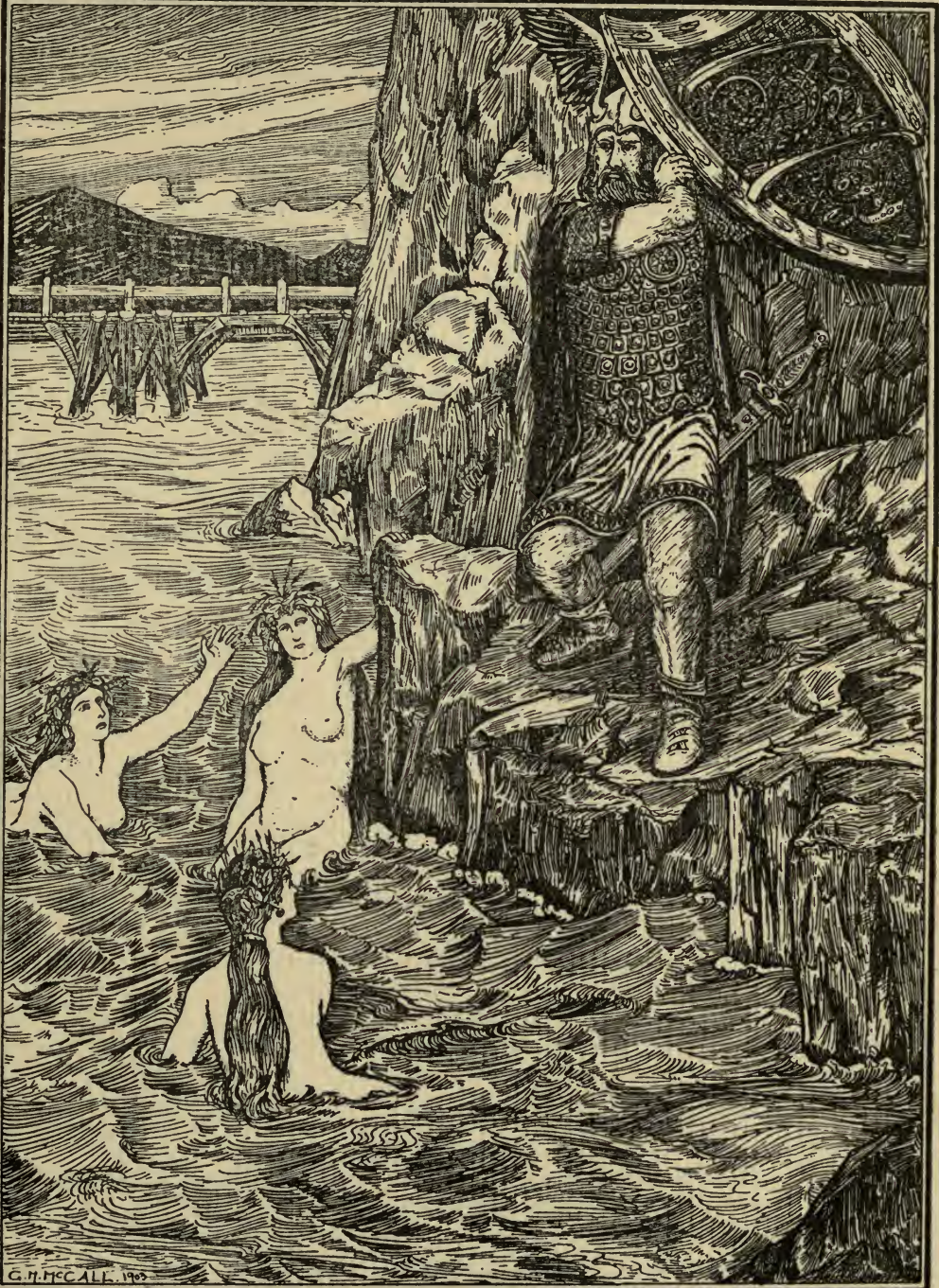
How's that ?

Volker

Who woos her, woos at the same time
But his own death ; for if he cannot win her
He never will return at all ; and is it
Already difficult to get to her,
To stand against her is much harder yet.
Soon there will be to every limb of hers
A wooer that is covered by cold earth ;
For many have already boldly sought her,
But not a single one has e'er return'd.

Gunther

That only proves she was for me intended,
The bride I sought so long is found at last.



G. H. McCALL, 1903

HAGEN SINKING THE TREASURE IN THE RHINE. ~

Brunhild will be the queen of Burgundy.
[Trumpets are heard quite near]
What is't?

The
Nibelungs

Hagen
[Goes to the window]
The hero from the Netherlands.

Gunther
Thou know'st him?

Hagen
Only look, who'd venture else
So daringly to enter here to us,
And yet with but a following of twelve.

Gunther
[Also goes to the window]
I do believe it; but what brings him here?

Hagen
I know not what allures him. For he surely
Comes not to bend himself before thee, and he has
At home all that which any one can wish.

Giselher
A noble champion.

Gunther
How must one receive him?
Hagen
Thou hadst best thank him, as he gives thee greeting.

Giselher
I will go down to meet him.

Geremot
So will I.

Hagen
For who does that 'tis no humiliation,
And—that he need not tell you so himself—
He has not only got a horned skin,
And at his side the Balmung blade does carry,
But is the lord of all the Nieblung treasure,
And wears the magic cap of Alberich,
And all that, I must honestly confess,
But through his strength, and nought by treachery,
Therefore I shall go too.

Gunther
We come too late.

[Siegfried enters with his twelve knights]

Siegfried

Greeting to thee, King Gunther of Burgundy !
Thou art amazed to see Siegfried here ?
He comes to fight with thee, and for thy realm.

Gunther

We fight not here for what's already ours.

Siegfried

For that then which it misses. I've a realm
As large as thine, and if thou art the victor
Thou shalt be king of it. What wilt thou more ?
Thou dost not grasp thy sword yet ? I have heard
That here the most courageous of all heroes
Assembled are, daring enough, with Thor
To fight about the thunder, did they but
Meet him by chance in one of their oak glades,
And proud enough then to disdain the booty.
Is that not true ? How ? Or art thou in doubt
About my pledge, and dost believe I cannot
Give it to thee because my father lives ?
King Sigmund gladly from his throne descends
As soon as I return, and he does yearn
With strenuous longing for me so to do ;
The old man feels the sceptre's weight too much.
And every knight that may be serving thee
With two I counterbalance ; for each village
I give a town, and for part of the Rhine
I offer thee the whole. Now, come and draw !

Dankwart

Who is it speaks so with a king ?

Siegfried

A king !

A knight does even speak so with a knight.
Who can possess and cares to—has he not
Given the proof that he with right possesses ?
And who does stifle all the murmurs round him—
Did he not first, the mightiest that lives
Throw to the ground and tread him with his feet ?
Art thou not he ? Then tell me whom thou fearest,
And I depart this hour yet, to challenge
Him then, instead of thee, before my sword.
Thou dost not name him, neither grasps thy weapon ?

I burn, my strength to measure with the knight
Who'll take all I possess or double it.
Is't strange to thee this feeling? I can not
Believe it, looking but at those who serve thee :
Proud men like these would never follow thee.
Didst not thou feel exactly as I do.

Dankwart

Thou surely art so greedy after fighting
Since thou dost wear the dragon's coat of mail.
Not everyone can cheat death as thou didst,
It finds an open door with all of us.

Siegfried

Also with me. (Be thanked thou ancient lime
That thou didst throw a leaf down upon me
While I was bathing in the dragon's blood ;
Be thanked, O wind, that thou didst shake it then.
So have I got the answer for the scoffer
Who hides his cowardice behind a taunt.)

Hagen

Sir Siegfried, Hagen Tronje I am called,
And this man is my brother.

Volker

[Draws his bow across his fiddle]

Siegfried

Hagen Tronje,
I greet thee ! But if it has angered thee
What I spoke here, thou only need'st to say it,
I'll put aside the king's son readily,
And meet thee just the same as I would Gunther.

Gunther

No word more, Hagen, ere thy king has spoken.

Siegfried

And if thou art afraid that thy good sword
Might split asunder 'gainst my hornèd skin,
I'll offer otherwise to thee : come down,
Where in the courtyard lies a block of stone,
That is to thee as heavy as to me :
We throw it, and thus prove we our strength.

Gunther

Thou'rt welcome, hero from the Netherlands,
And what here pleases thee, take it, it's thine ;
Drink but with us ere carrying it away.

The
Nibelungs

Siegfried

Speak'st thou so mildly to me? Then I'd beg
That thou at once might'st send me to my father,
Who is the only one may chastise me.
But let me do but as the little children,
Who ne'er at once desist from an ill habit:
Come, throw with me, then will I drink with ye.

Gunther

So be it, Siegfried.

Siegfried (to Dankwart)

And what touches you,
Is it not true, I pinched but your third arm,
It did not hurt, I know, you have it not.

(to all)

When I did enter here, a dread did seize me,
As I have never felt one in my life.
I shivered as if winter had returned,
And suddenly my mother I remembered
Who never used to cry when I did leave;
But this time cried she, as if all the water
Of the whole world its way took through her eyes,
That made my head so queer and strange, in sooth
I did not like to dismount from my horse.
Now you'll not get me soon up there again.

SCENE III

[Ute and Kriemhild enter]

Ute

The falcon is thy lord.

Kriemhild

No further, mother.
Cannot my dream be otherwise expounded.
I ever heard that love brought but short joy
And lasting sorrow; I do see it also
In thee, and therefore will I never love,
Oh! never, never!

Ute

Child, what dost thou say!
'Tis true at last love brings us also sorrow,
For one is bound to die before the other,
And how that hurts, that thou canst see in me.



1903
A. H. MISCALL
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Prologue

KRIEMHILD AND UTE WATCHING THE THROW.

Sc. iii

But all the bitter tears that I am weeping
Have amply been prepaid by the first kiss
That long ago thy father gave to me.)
He also, ere he died, provided comfort,
For, if I can be proud of valiant sons,
And if I now clasp thee against my bosom,
It only can be so because I loved.
Therefore a rhyme must never frighten thee,
My joys were long, and short my sorrows are.

Kriemhild

(Ne'er to possess is better than to lose.) ✓

Ute

(What in this world is it thou dost not lose?)
Even thyself. Remain'st thou as thou art?
Look but at me. Much as thou mayest smile
I once was like to thee, and, credit me,
Thou wilt be as I am. (What wilt thou keep
If thou canst never even keep thyself?)
Take all then as it comes, and grasp like us
That which does please thee, even if grim death
Blows it to dust for thee, whene'er it likes :
Thy hand that grasps it also turns to dust.

Kriemhild

[Goes near the window]

As now my heart feels, mother, I could swear——

[She looks out and stops]

Ute

Why dost thou break off? And that fiery blush !
What has disturbed thee so?

Kriemhild

[Steps back]

How long is't custom

In our court, that we are told no more
When visitors have held their entrance here?
Does this proud castle here in Worms become
But like a shepherd's hut, that everyone
By night and day can crawl into who will?

Ute

Why be so fiery?

Kriemhild

I but just did want
To look at the young bears down in the courtyard
Who do so funnily roll o'er each other,

And as I harmlessly the shutter open'd
A knight stared rudely up into my face.

Ute

And so this knight made it impossible
For thee to end the vow thou didst begin ?

[She also goes to the window]

Ay, truly who sees him as he stands there
He does reflect should he the vow continue.

Kriemhild

What have my brothers' guests to do with me
As long as I do know how to avoid them?

Ute

Well, I am glad this time that only anger
Thy cheeks did colour, for this youthful hero
Who just now stepped between thee and thy bears
Is long since married, and has got a son.

Kriemhild

Thou know'st him ?

Ute

Certainly.

Kriemhild

What is his name ?

Ute

I know it not ! But now I do know thee,
Thou suddenly has turned as pale as death !—
And truly if this falcon thou dost capture,
Then from the eagle thou hast nought to fear.
He is a match for all, I vouch for it.

Kriemhild

I never will tell thee another dream.

Ute

Not so, Kriemhild. I am not mocking thee ;
We often see God's finger in a dream,
And if we still in waking, frightened, tremble
As thou dost now, then certainly we saw it.
But we must understand the sign aright
It gives to us, and not in our fear
Vow things impossible. So do thou guard
The falcon that is flying towards thee,
That never may the eagle tear it up ;
But do not think to frighten it away,
For with it would'st thou scare all joy of life.

For higher than a noble hero's love
Stands nothing in this world, although thou dost
Not feel it yet beneath thy maiden wreath,
And were no better one granted to thee
Than this one here, I never should refuse him.

[She looks out of the window]

Kriemhild

He will not woo, so I'll not have to do it.

Ute

[Laughs]

Well, I yet jump as far, old as I am.

Kriemhild

What goes on down there, mother, that thou laugh'st?

Ute

They throw in emulation, so it seems,
And Giseler, thy brother, threw the first.
Well, well, he is the youngest. But see now :
'Tis the strange hero's turn. Alas ! my son,
Where wilt thou be ? Look, now he will begin,
He lifts his arm, now— Hey, the stone will fly
As if it were a bird ; but do come here
And stand behind me, for a second time
Thou wilt not see it, it concerns the utmost,
He wants to end it all but with one throw !
Now—have I got my eyes or have I none ?
No further ?

Kriemhild

[Comes nearer]

Hast thou lauded him too early ?

Ute

That only is one foot.

Kriemhild

[Stands behind Ute]

That is yet more,

As if it were one inch.

Ute

But by one foot

To overthrow this child !

Kriemhild

It is not much !

Especially when sprawling one's self out.

The
Nibelungs

And how he pants !

Ute

Kriemhild

It is for such a giant—
Quite funny ! Were it I, I deserved pity,
Because for me it would be quite a deed.

Ute

Now Gerenot is coming into action.
Does it not suit him well? He has among
Them all the most resemblance to his father.
Start valiantly, my son ! That was a throw !

Kriemhild

Even the bear's astounded. He had not
Expected it, and suddenly gets brisk.

Ute

Go thou to seek adventures when thou wilt !
But Giselher stays here.

Kriemhild

Do they continue?
No, make not room for me, I see quite well.

Ute

Now it's the knight again ! But now he does
Exert himself no more ; he seems beforehand
The vict'ry to renounce. How can one be
So much mistaken ? But what does he do ?
He turns around, his back towards the aim
Instead of looking, and he throws the stone
Away, high over head and shoulder. Well,
One can mistake, and Gerenot is, too,
Vanquished like Giselher !

Kriemhild

'Tis true, again
It's but one foot. But now he does not pant.

Ute

They're, after all, good children that I have.
Trueheartedly does Gerenot take his hand,
Another man might haply grasp his sword.
Such arrogance is really not nice.

Kriemhild

One well can see he does not mean it ill.

Ute

And Volker puts his fiddle still aside,
That mockingly he played.

Kriemhild

That single foot
Disturbs him in his joy. Now it would be
The Marshall's turn, if slowly as on stairs
It upwards went, but now King Gunther pushes
Impatiently past Dankwart, for he wishes
To try himself.

Ute

And he does it with luck
Full twice as far as Gerenot.

Kriemhild

And yet
Not far enough. Thou see'st the knight did follow
At once, and yet again one foot there fails.

Ute

The king does laugh. Well, then, I can laugh too !
I long have seen that this the falcon is
On whom thy dream can ne'er fulfil itself.
But now he has at last used his full strength.

Kriemhild

Now comes the Tronjer.

Ute

In his heart it festers,
Though he looks cheerful. He does grasp the stone
As if he'd like to crush it. How it flies !
Unto the wall ! Well, further he cannot ;
That is a throw that no one can surpass,
For even for one foot there is no room.

Kriemhild

And yet the knight does fetch again the stone.

Ute

But why ? Oh, gracious God, what happens now ?
Does over our head the castle fall ?
It roars !

Kriemhild

Right up into the tower, where
The daws and bats are driven from their nest.

The
Nibelungs

Ute
They blindly fly into the light.

Kriemhild
The wall
Has got a hole.

Ute
Impossible !

Kriemhild
But wait
Until the dust has clear'd. Big as a window,
Where passed the stone.

Ute
Now I can see it too.

Kriemhild
Into the Rhine the stone flew.

Ute
Who'd believe it !
And yet it's true, the water does attest it,
It's spurting up as high as heav'n.

Kriemhild
That is
A little more than the one foot.

Ute
For that
He does at least now wipe his heated brow.
Thank God ! Else would the Tronjer die with fury !

Kriemhild
Now it is o'er. They shake each other's hands.
Dankwart and Volker both did lose their turn.

Ute
Come, we forget ; it now is time for Mass.

SCENE IV

[The knights enter again]

Gunther
You are a rogue, Sir Siegfried.

Siegfried

Are you cross ?

The
Nibelungs

Giselher

Do but forgive, that even I did venture
To stand against you. But as penalty
I will with my old mother Ute fight,
And if I vanquish her then may you all,
Before the people and with sounding trumpets,
With oak leaves garland me, just as you like.

Siegfried

No more of it. The throw was not so bad ;
You only lack ten years.

Hagen

And was the last
Then really your best ?

Siegfried

Can one show that
When playing ?

Gunther

Let me welcome thee once more !
I should praise myself happy in succeeding
In keeping thee near me, otherwise than
As fleeting guest. But then, what have I got
That I could offer thee ? And if it were
My right arm here, with which I'd fain would try
The service of thy left hand to purchase—
Thou would'st say no, or else would'st be a loser !

Siegfried

Take care, I shall be begging, ere thou know'st.

Gunther

Whate'er it be, I grant it now to thee.

Siegfried

Be thanked for this word. I never shall
Forget it thee, but I shall give it back
At once to thee, because my wishes are
Foolhardier than thou guessest. I was modest
When I did ask thee only for thy realm.

Gunther

Thou canst not frighten me.

The
Nibelungs

Siegfried

Thou hast perhaps
Heard of my treasures? Well, it is quite certain
Thou need'st not tremble for thy gold and silver.
I have so much of it that I would rather
Give it away than cart it home; but then
It helps me not, what I would buy with it
Is not for sale.

Gunther

That is?

Siegfried

Dost thou not guess?
Another face than this that I have here.

Gunther

Hast thou yet put the old one to the test?

Siegfried

Yes, with my mother, and there with success;
It pleases her.

Gunther

Not elsewhere?

Siegfried

Sure enough!

Didst thou not notice it? A maiden looked
Into the courtyard down at us before,
She shook her golden locks that, like a curtain,
Her eyes did cover, and when she did see me
Among you, she drew quicker back than I
Did in the realm of dwarfs, when there my foot
As I thought trod on earth, that suddenly
Did draw together and so formed a face
That showed its teeth at me.

Gunther

'Tis nought but shyness!

Try only yet again. (But if thou dost
A wooer want, I'll render thee the service;
But thou must render then the same to me,
Because Kriemhild, my sister, may not go
Before Brunhild does hold her entry here.)

Siegfried

Oh, king! what name is it that thou dost mention?
The northern maiden think'st thou to bring home,
She, in whose veins does liquid iron boil?
Oh, give it up!

Gunther

But why? Is she not worth it?

Siegfried

Not worth it! Why, her fame flies through the world!
But none in fight resists her, one excepted,
And this one nevermore will choose her now.

Gunther

And so because of fear I should not woo her?
What a disgrace! Much rather from her hand
Death to receive, than live a thousand years
In this impotency's disgraceful feeling.

Siegfried

Thou know'st not what thou say'st. Is it disgrace
For thee that fire burns thee, and that water
Draws thee down to its depth? Well, she is like
The elements, and one man there is only
Who can o'ercome her, and as he does please
Can either keep her or give her away!
(But would'st thou care from some one to accept her
That neither is her father nor her brother?)

Gunther

First I shall try, what I myself can do.

Siegfried

Thou'lt not succeed; success cannot attend thee.
She throws thee in the dust, and do not think
That clemency lives in her iron breast,
And that, perhaps, when she sets eyes on thee
She will not let the fight take place at all!
She knows that not; and for her maidenhood
She fights as were her life bound up in it
And like the lightning that has got no eyes,
Or as the lake that does not hear a cry,
She, without pity, does kill every knight
Who wants her maiden girdle to undo.
(So, give her up, and think of her no more,
If thou wilt not receive her from another,
If thou wilt not receive her from myself.)

Gunther

And why should I not?

Siegfried

That do ask thyself.

I am quite ready to go down with thee
If thou giv'st me thy sister as reward,
For only for her sake did I come here.

The
Nibelungs

If thou in fight hadst lost thy realm to me,
Thou would'st with her have bought it back again.

Hagen

How dost thou think to do it?

Siegfried

Hardest proofs
Must be sustained. She throws the stone like me
And after it jumps so far as it flies ;
She casts the spear, and at a hundred paces
She pierces iron sevenfold, and so
Yet more. (It matters not, we share the deed ;
Mine be the work, and thine the gesture be.)

Hagen

He is to start, and thou dost want to throw
And jump?

Siegfried

Yes, so I mean it. And withal
To carry him.

Hagen

'Tis folly ! How could'st thou
Delude her so?

Siegfried

But through my magic cap
That once already hid me from her gaze.

Hagen

Hast thou been there?

Siegfried

I was, but did not woo,
And only saw, yet was myself not seen !
You stare, and look at me full of surprise.
I well do see I must the cuckoo act
Ere you confide in me ; but I do think
We save it for the ride, for that is long.
I can besides, when talking of myself,
Into the water gaze.

Gunther

No, speak at once
Of Iceland, and of thy adventures there.
We love to hear it, and were near enough
Ourselves to do it.

Siegfried

The
Nibelungs

Well then ! The desire
To fight drove me so far down, and at once,
The first day, near a cavern I did meet
Two youthful champions that fought furiously.
The two were brothers, and King Niebelung's sons,
That only just their father had been burying—
Had slain him too, as I heard afterwards—
And fought for the inheritance. Whole heaps
Of precious stones were lying there piled up
Around them, and between lay ancient crowns,
And strangely twisted horns, and before all
Was Balmung, and out from the cavern shone
The masses of red gold. When I appeared
They did demand with wildest violence
That I should halve the treasure as a stranger.
I gladly granted it to hinder murder
Which they were threat'ning, but it was in vain,
For when I'd done, each one did think himself
Curtailed, and stormed, and I did throw the halves
At their demand confusedly together,
And halved again. But then, they did become
More furious yet, and rushed—while I did lie
Bent down on both my knees, and quietly
Thought of a settlement—in blindest fury,
Against me suddenly with quick drawn swords.
I, to defend myself against those madmen,
Did grasp at Balmung, that lay next to me,
As I had not the time to draw my sword ;
And ere I thought it, they had both of them
Like boars which blindly rush on to the iron
Themselves been piercing, though I quietly lay
And spared them. And so I became the heir
To the whole treasure.

Hagen

Bloodily, and yet honestly.

Siegfried

Now I did want to go into the cavern,
But how I stared no more to find the entrance.
A wall it seemed out of the earth had risen
Quite suddenly, and I now tried to pierce it,
To make a way for me ; but then there flowed
Instead of water—blood ; it winced, and I
Believed a worm was hidden in the wall.
I erred, for all the wall was but one worm,
Who, sleeping a thousand years in rocky cleft,
With grass and moss was overgrown, and rather

The
Nibelungs

The jagged back of quite a chain of hills
Resembled, than an animal that breathed.

Hagen

That was the dragon !

Siegfried

Yes, I slew it then,
Because I mounted it before it reared,
And from behind, while riding on its neck,
Did shatter its blue head. It was perhaps
The very hardest thing that I accomplished,
And without Balmung it had ne'er succeeded.
I hewed myself then through the monster's body,
Through all the flesh and all the mighty bones,
As through a rocky mountain, by degrees,
Right through the cavern'd wall. But when I hardly
Had entered it, I felt myself embraced
With clasping, powerful arms, that yet my eye
Could not perceive, while they my ribs compressed
As if it were the air itself that did it.
'Twas Alberich, the savage dwarf ; and never
Was I so near to death as in the awful
Fight with this monster. (But he did become
Visible at last, and all was lost for him ;)
For without knowing it, I from his head
Had pulled the magic cap while we were wrestling,
And with his cap he lost his strength, and fell.
Now I did want to crush him like a beast,
But he redeemed his neck, that was already
Beneath my heel, by telling me a secret
I ne'er suspected. He disclosed to me
The magic that the dragon's blood contained
As long as it yet smoked, and hurriedly
I set him free, and there took my red bath.

Gunther

So didst thou gain them all by honest fight—
All, Balmung and the magic cap, the treasure,
Thy hornèd skin, and in one day ?

Siegfried

'Tis so !
And the birds' language too. For when a drop
Of the enchanted blood did touch my lips
I understood the twittering above,
And had I not too quickly wiped it off,
I too should understand what hops and jumps.
Think, of a sudden in the tree its whisper—
For an old lime tree covered all—then titters

And laughs and mocks, so that I, human beings
Believed I heard, who in the leaves were hidden,
And that were mocking me. When I looked round
I nought could see but birds, rooks, daws, and owls
Fighting each other. Brunhild they did name,
And me. A coil of obscure talk and speeches
O'er here and over there. But one thing clear :
One more adventure does yet wait for me.
Desire wakes. The daw flies on before,
The owl does follow. Soon a sea of flames
Does bar the way. A castle, like glowing metal
Shining in shimm'ring bluish-green, emerges
Now over there. (I stop, then cries the daw :
Now, Balmung, quickly draw out of its sheath
And wave it thrice around thy head. I do it,
And quicker than a light, the sea's extinct.
Now they are moving in the castle, figures
Do on the battlements appear, veils flutter,
A haughty maiden searchingly looks down.
Then suddenly shrieks the owl : That is the bride !
And off now with the magic cap ! I had
But worn it as a proof, and knew not even
That I still had it on my head. But now
I held it well with both my hands, because
I saw the forward birds trying to catch it.
For Brunhild touched, as she was standing there
In all her glorious beauty, not my heart ;
And who feels in himself he cannot woo,
He greets not either.

Volker

That's a noble word.

Siegfried

So I departed unseen, and yet know
The castle and its secret, as the way.

Gunther

Then lead me, hero !

Volker

No, king, stay at home,

'Twill badly end.

Siegfried

Dost mean I cannot keep
What I have promised ?

Volker

No ; I only mean
That vicious artifice becomes us not.

**The
Nibelungs**

But others are no use.

Gunther

Volker

Then do abstain.

Gerenot

I also counsel that.

Hagen

And why?

Gunther

It seems

To me as little shame as to go by ship
When I the distant shore through swimming cannot
Reach, and to use my dagger instead of
My fist.

Siegfried

Look at it so and grasp my hand.

Gunther

Well then, for Brunhild I give thee Kriemhild,
And our wedding we will keep together!

Hagen

[Puts his finger to his lips, looks at Siegfried and touches
his sword]

Siegfried

Am I a woman? To eternity
No word! While you are hurrying to the fight
I will seem to be wanted in the ship,
And go down to the shore, that she shall see it;
But with the magic cap I shall return
And pinch thee in the arm and will assist thee.

[Exeant]

PART II

Siegfried's Death

*A TRAGEDY
IN FIVE ACTS*

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

King Gunther

Hagen Tronje

Dankwart

Volker

Giselher

Gerenot

Wulf, } *Knights*
Truchs, }

Rumolt

Siegfried

Ute

Kriemhild

Brunhild, Queen of Iceland

Frigga, her Nurse

A Chaplain

A Chamberlain

Knights, People, Maidservants, Dwarfs

ACT I

[Iceland. Brunhild's Castle. Early Morning]

SCENE I

[Brunhild and Frigga come from opposite sides]

Brunhild

Where from so early? Wet with dew's thy hair,
And blood besprinkled is thy gown?

Frigga

I have

Offered a sacrifice to the old gods
Before the moon did break!

Brunhild

To the old gods?
Now reigns the cross. And Thor and Odin sit
As devils down in hell.

Frigga

And art thou less
Afraid of them therefore? They still are able
To curse us, if they cannot bless us more.
And willingly I slay for them their buck.
Oh, if thou would'st but do it! Thou hast reason;
None other has.

Brunhild

Have I?

Frigga

Another time.
I long ago ought to have told thee. But
To-day the hour's come at last.

Brunhild

Already?

I thought it ne'er would come but with thy death.
Therefore I ceased to urge thee.

The
Nibelungs

Frigga

Listen now!

Right suddenly from our burning mountain
Stepped an old man, and gave a child to me,
With it a Runic tablet.

Brunhild

In the night?

Frigga

How dost thou know it?

Brunhild

Speaking in thy sleep
Thou hast betrayed thyself, just when the moon
Shines in thy face.

Frigga

And thou dost listen? Well—

It was midnight. We watched around the body
Of our queen. His hair was white as snow,
And longer than I ever on a woman
Have seen it, for just like a wide loose mantle
It waved around him, and behind it trailed.

Brunhild

The mountain spirit!

Frigga

I know not. He never
Did speak one word. But she, the girlie, stretched
Her little hands towards the golden crown,
That glistened on the head of the dead queen,
And—wonderful!—it fitted.

Brunhild

How! the child?

Frigga

The child: and never was too wide for her
And later ne'er became too tight!

Brunhild

Like mine.

Frigga

Yes, just like thine. And what's more wonderful,
The girlie was so like the child, the dead
Had in her arm, and that at once did vanish
As if it ne'er had been, in her whole figure
Did so resemble it, that by its breathing

She only differed from it, and it seemed
As if the self-same body had by nature
Been twice created for one purpose, and
The blood been but transfused.

Brunhild

How was it, that
The queen a child had in her arm ?

Frigga

She had
Died at its birth, and with her died at once
The fruit.

Brunhild

Thou never hast said that till now.

Frigga

Then I did but forget it. Surely broke
Her heart from grief, that she could never show
It to her husband. Many years he had
In vain been wishing for this sweetest joy,
And just a month it was, before it came,
A sudden death did strike him.

Brunhild

Tell me further.

Frigga

We looked around for the old man. He'd vanished !
And our mountain, that split through the middle
Just like an apple, through the window had
Been yawning at us, slowly closed up now.

Brunhild

And came the old man not again ?

Frigga

Hear more.

On the next morning we laid our lady
Into her grave, and at the same time did
The priest wish to baptise the child. But lame
Became his arm, before with holy water
He could her forehead moisten, and he has
Since never raised it more.

Brunhild

No, never more !

The
Nibelungs

Frigga

Well, he was old, so we were not afraid,
And called another, who this time succeeded
In moist'ning her, but he became then dumb
When he did want to bless her, and to him
His speech did never more return.

Brunhild

The third?

Frigga

It took us long to find him. And we had
To call one from a distance, who knew nought
Of all this. He completed then the work ;
But when he barely reached the end, he fell
On to the ground, and never rose again.

Brunhild

But she, the child?

Frigga

She grew and strengthened ;
And e'en her childish games did serve to us
As signs of what to leave and what to do.
And ne'er deceived, as had the Runic tablet
Predicted us before.

Brunhild

Oh, Frigga ! Frigga !

Frigga

Yes ! It is thou ! Dost know it then at last ?
Not in the chamber where the dead are crumbling,
But in Mount Hecla, where the gods reside,
And among Nornas and Valkyries
Seek thee thy mother, if thou hast got one.
Oh, if but ne'er a drop of holy water
Had moistened thy brow ! Then we should know
Much more.

Brunhild

What murmur'st thou ?

Frigga

How did it happen,
That we this morning, instead of in bed,
Did ourselves find dressed in our seats,
With chatt'ring teeth and our lips turned blue ?

Brunhild

We must have fallen suddenly asleep.

Frigga

Has that to us yet happened ?

Brunhild

Ne'er before.

Frigga

Well, then ! The old man came, and wished to speak.
It even seems to me as if I'd seen him
As he was shaking thee, and threatened me ;
But to thee was by a most heavy sleep
Thy hearing closed, for thou wert not to hear
What fate is thine, if thou wilt yet persist ;
Bring then a sacrifice and free thyself.
Oh ! had I only not obeyed the priest
When he did press me ! But I had not then
Deciphered the tablet. Do it, child,
Because the danger's near.

Brunhild

The danger ?

Frigga

Danger !

Thou know'st the flaming lake is long extinguished
That did surround thy castle.

Brunhild

And yet stayed

The champion with the Balmung blade away,
Who, high on horseback, was to ride it through,
When Fafner's gory treasure he had won.

Frigga

I haply read wrong. But this second sign
Cannot deceive me, for I've known it long,
That in decision's hour does await thee
The revelation. Therefore, sacrifice !
Perhaps the gods will invisibly stand
Around thee, all, and will appear to thee
As soon as the first drop of blood does run.

Brunhild

I do fear nothing.

[Trumpets are heard]

Frigga

Trumpets !

Brunhild

Hast thou never

Heard them before ?

The
Nibelungs

Frigga

Never before with fear.
The time is past now for beheading thistles,
And heads of iron rise in front of thee.

Brunhild

Come on! come on! That I may show to her
That I yet able am to vanquish. Then,
When here the lake yet flamed I ran to meet you,
And, friendly, as a dog before its master
Does jump aside, the faithful flames gave way
Before me, parting to the right and left.
Now free became the way, but not the greeting.

[During this she mounts her throne]
Throw open wide the gates and let them in!
Whoever may appear, his head I'll win!

SCENE II

[It is done; Siegfried, Gunther, Hagen and Volker enter]

Brunhild

Who is it wants to die this day?

(to *Siegfried*)

Is't thou?

Siegfried

I do not want to die, nor want to woo,
And thou dost also honour me too much
By greeting me the first, before King Gunther.
I am here but his guide.

Brunhild

[Turns towards Gunther]

So it is thou?

And dost thou know the price?

Gunther

I know it well.

Siegfried

Thy beauty's fame has penetrated far,
But further still the fame of all the rigour;
Whoe'er it is that looks into thine eye,
Will not forget in his supreme enchantment
That by thy side there stands grim, gloomy death.

Brunhild

The
Nibelungs

'Tis so. Who does not vanquish here, he dies.
With him his servants. Thou dost smile at it?
Be not too proud! Though thou dost come before me
As if thou could'st a goblet full of wine
Hold without spilling it above thy head,
And look at me the while, as at a picture,
I swear to thee, thou diest as well as he.

(to *Gunther*)

To thee I counsel if thou wilt but listen ;
Allow my maidens first to name to thee
The champions that have fallen by my hands.
Perhaps there's some amongst them that before
'Gainst thee their strength did measure, haply one
Who saw thee lying vanquished at his feet.

Hagen

King Gunther never has been vanquished yet.

Siegfried

High stands his castle on the Rhine at Worms,
His country's rich in every ornament ;
But higher does he stand, above all knights,
And richer is himself in every honour.

Hagen

Thy hand here Netherlands! That was a word.

Volker

And would'st thou find it then so hard to leave
Of thy free will this country desolate
And dreary ocean desert ; out of hell
And night, the king into the world to follow ?
It is no country, that does yet to earth
At all belong, but an abandoned reef,
That all that live deserted long ago ;
And if thou lov'st it, thou canst only love it
Because thou art the last, was born on it.
This storming in the air, this constant roaring
Of the wild waves, this gasping fire-mountain,
And, above all, this light that, ever red,
Does from the vault of heaven trickle down
As if it did stream off an off'ring table,
Are terrible, and only suit the devil :
Why, one drinks blood, while only drawing breath !

Brunhild

What dost thou know then of my loneliness?
I never yet missed ought out of your world,

The
Nibelungs

And if I ever did, I'd come and fetch it,
Rely on that, and should not want it given.

Siegfried

Have I not told you right? To fight! To fight!
Only by force canst thou lead her away;
Once it is done she will thank thee for it.

Brunhild

Dost think so? Well, thou might'st deceive thyself.
Does one of you know what I am for you
To sacrifice? No, no; and none has known it.
First hear it, and then ask how I'll defend it!
Indeed, with us the time stands still, we know not
The spring, the summer, nor the autumn time.
With us the year does never change its face,
And we are invariable with it.
But even if here nought of all does thrive,
Which towards you does grow beneath the sun's rays,
In our night ripens instead of it
What you are powerless to sow and plant.
Yet gladdens me the fight; yet I exult
To overcome the haughty enemy
Who wants to rob me of my freedom; yet
Is youth enough for me, and the glad rising
Feeling of life: and ere this can forsake me
Has Fate with wondrous gifts bless'd me already
And consecrated me to its High Priestess.

Frigga

What happens? Was my sacrifice enough?

Brunhild

Before me suddenly the earth will open,
Revealing to me what contains its core;
I'll hear the sounding of the stars above,
And understand their harmony divine;
And yet a third joy is to be my share—
A third, that never can be grasped at all.

Frigga

'Tis thou, Odin! Thou hast unsealed her eye
Because at night her ear was locked to thee.
She sees herself now what the Norna spins.

Brunhild

[Stands erect, with a fixed look]

Once comes the morn, when I, instead of hunting
The bear, or also, instead of releasing
The frozen sea-snake out of its confinement,

So that it should not lacerate the planet,
Do leave the castle early. Lustily
I ride my black horse, that does gladly bear me ;
But suddenly I stop. The ground before me
Has changed itself to air. I shudd'ring turn
My horse around. The same behind ! It is
Transparent. Coloured clouds are under me,
And are above. The maidens babble on.
I call : But are you blind that you see nought ?
We hover in the abyss ! They do wonder
And shake their heads in silence. Then they gather
Quite closely round me. Only Frigga murmurs :
Has now thine hour come ? Then first I know
The earthly globe's become for me a crystal,
And what seemed clouds to me, was but the texture
Of all the gold and silver veins, that shining
Do cross it to its core.

Frigga

Ah ! Triumph ! Triumph !

Brunhild

An evening follows. Not at once. Perhaps
But late. We sit together here. When suddenly
The maids fall down as dead, and their last word
Is broken on their lips ; but it drives me
Up to the tower, for it resounds above me,
And every star a tone has of its own.
At first it's only music for me, but
When dawns the morn, I murmur as in sleep :
Before it's night the king dies, and his son
Cannot be born, and in the womb is stifled.
I only hear from others that I said it,
And do not guess myself, wherefrom I know it.
But soon it's clear to me, and spreads from Pole
To Pole. Then do they wander yet to me as now,
But not with swords to have a fight with me ;
Nay, humbly, and their crowns are laid aside
To listen to my dreams, and to expound
My stamm'ring, for my eye does pierce the future,
And in my hands I hold the keys to all
The treasures of this world. So I, enthroned,
Am without destiny ; yet wise in it,
High above all, and am forgetting quite
That yet another thing was promised me.
The centuries roll on, thousands of years,
I feel it not ! But ask myself at last :
Why tarries death ? Then through the looking-glass
My locks do answer me, for they are black

The
Nibelungs

And have remained unbleached, and then I cry :
That is the third that death will never come !

[She sinks back. Her maids catch hold of her]

Frigga

What fear I yet? Were it the Balmung champion
Now she would have a shield even 'gainst him !
He falls, if loving him she yet does fight him,
And fight she will, now that she knows all this.

Brunhild

[Stands again erect]

I spoke! What was it?

Frigga

Child, take now thy bow,
Thine arrow 'll fly to-day, as ne'er before.
The other, after !

Brunhild (to the *Knights*)

Come then !

Siegfried (to *Brunhild*)

Thou dost swear
To follow us at once if thou art vanquished ?

Brunhild

[Laughs]

I swear !

Siegfried

Then fight, while I prepare the ship.

Brunhild (to *Frigga*, while going)

Go thou into the Trophy Hall, and there
Another nail knock in the wall !

(to the *Knights*)

Come on !

[Exeant]

ACT II

[Worms. Castle-yard]

SCENE I

[Rumolt and Giselher meeting each other]

Giselher

Well, Rumolt, shall there be a tree left standing?
For weeks thou'st carted all the forests in,
And dost prepare so fiercely for the wedding,
As if expecting man and dwarf and elf.

Rumolt

I stand in readiness, and did I find
A kettle somewhere, not quite full enough,
I'd stick at once the lazy cook in it,
And with the kitchen-boy stir it round.

Giselher

So art thou then so certain of the end?

Rumolt

I am, for Siegfried woo's. Who on the way
Two sons of kings does catch and sends them here,
As if they only were two hunted hares,
He surely can compete with dev'lish women.

Giselher

There, thou art right. We have the best of pledges,
And these two, Ruediger and Ruedegast,
They thought to come to us with such an army
As never Burgundy the like has seen.
Instead of that, as prisoners they appeared,
Who did not even want a keeper more.

[Gerenot comes]

Here comes the hunter!

Gererot

Without any game!
I was on our tower, and saw the Rhine
With ships is nearly covered.

Rumolt

That's the bride!
Yet in this hour I shall have all slain
That growls, and lows, and grunts down in the yard,
That she may in the distance hear already
How she shall be received.

[Sounds of trumpets]

Gererot

It is too late!

SCENE II

Siegfried

Here am I once again!

Giselher

Without my brother?

Siegfried

Be easy! As his messenger I'm here,
But not to thee my message to deliver!
It is sent to thy mother, and I hope
To be allowed to see thy sister, too.

Giselher

Thou surely shalt do so, for yet we owe
Our thanks to thee for both the Danish princes.

Siegfried

I do wish now that I had never sent them.

Giselher

Why not? Thou never could'st have shown more clearly
To us what we have won in thee, for truly
They were not mean or base men thou hast sent.

Siegfried

May be! But if I had not done it, then
A bird might haply here have spread the rumour
That they had killed me in the fight, and I
Might ask thee now: How bore Kriemhild the news?

In any case they served thee well with us!
 I long have known that one with hearty strokes
 Does round the bronze and metals into trumpets,
 But among men it was not known to me.
 Well, these two prove what thou as smith canst do :
 They praised thee so, that if thou hadst but heard it
 Thou would'st still blush to-day. And that not only
 From prudence, that does often praise the en'my,
 Because it's gilding thereby the disgrace
 Of their defeat—nay, out of honest liking.
 But thou dost hear that better from Kriemhild,
 Who never tired was of questioning them.
 There does she come.

SCENE III

[Ute and Kriemhild enter]

Siegfried

I prithee !

Giselher

What is it ?

Siegfried

I never have wished for my father yet
 That he should teach me how I am to fight,
 But with my mother I could do to-day
 That I might ask her how one is to speak.

Giselher

Give me thy hand, as thou art really shy.
 They call me here the child. So let them see
 This child can lead the lion.

[He leads Siegfried to the ladies]

Here the hero

From the Netherlands !

Siegfried

Do not be frightened, ladies,

That it is I alone.

Ute

Nay, valiant Siegfried,
 We are not that. For thou art not the knight

Who'd stay behind when all the others fell,
That distress should not lack a messenger.
Thou dost announce to me my second daughter,
And to Kriemhild, her sister.

Siegfried

Noble queen,

'Tis so.

Giselher

'Tis so. Nought else? And even that
Said with difficulty. Dost thou begrudge
Her to the king, my brother, or hast thou—
Though there is no example of it known—
Thy tongue sprained in the fight? Yet that cannot be,
For thou didst use it well enough just now,
When telling me of Brunhild's hazel eyes
And hair as black as night.

Siegfried

Do not believe it.

Giselher

He raises, to give weight to his denial,
Three of his fingers, and does swear allegiance
To blue and fair.

Ute

That is an arrant rogue
That stands between the birch and hazel tree :
His mother's rod outgrowing long ago
He never yet his father's whip has felt,
And is as arrogant as a young foal,
That nothing of the reins and whip yet knows.
Pray pardon him, or chastise him !

Siegfried

That might

Be dangerous ! For it is difficult
To tame wild foals, and many limp away
Ashamed, ere one does mount them.

Ute

So once more

He does escape the penalty.

Giselher

As thanks,

I want to tell thee something.

Kriemhild

Giselher !

Giselher

Hast thou something to hide? Be not afraid!
I do not know thy secret, and seek not
To blow the ashes from above thy coals.

Ute

What is it, then?

Giselher

Now I've myself forgot!
When suddenly one's sister blushes so,
Of course, as brother, one does think about it,
And asks oneself the reason. Never mind!
I'm sure to think of it before I die,
And then he'll know at once.

Siegfried

Thou'rt right to mock me,
For I've entirely forgot my errand,
And ere I yet into your Sunday suits
Have driven you, you'll hear the trumpets sound,
And Gunther will arrive here with his bride.

Giselher

Dost thou not see the kitchen-master run?
To him thy coming has told quite enough!
I'll help him.

[He goes to Rumolt]

Kriemhild

To such a noble messenger
We may not offer a gift!

Siegfried

Oh, yes; you may.

Kriemhild

[Wants to unfasten her clasp, and drops her kerchief]

Siegfried

[Catches it]

And this be it!

Kriemhild

That suits not thee, nor me.

Siegfried

What's dust to others, jewels are to me.
I can build houses out of gold and silver,
But lack just such a kerchief.

Kriemhild

Take it, then.

Myself I wove it.

Siegfried

And dost like to give it?

Kriemhild

My noble Siegfried, yes; I like to give it.

Ute

But now permit—it's time for us to go.

[Out with Kriemhild]

SCENE IV

Siegfried

A Roland might stand so, as I stood here!
I wonder that no sparrow in my hair
Did build its nest.

SCENE V

[The Chaplain comes near]

Chaplain

Pardon me, noble knight,
Is Brunhild yet baptized?

Siegfried

She is baptized.

Chaplain

So she comes hither from a Christian country?

Siegfried

The cross is honoured.

Chaplain (steps back)

As it's honoured here,
Where they perhaps, next to a Wodan's oak,
Put up with it, because one cannot know
If it holds no enchantment, and as still

The
Nibelungs

Then she turned mad, and as he would not yield
She seized and held him there, to his and our
Eternal shame, with wide outstretchèd arm
Far out into the Rhine.

Siegfried

A devil's woman.

Hagen

Why scold'st thou? Help!

Siegfried

I think when once the priest's
United them——

Hagen

Were only the old woman,
The nurse, not here that accompanies her.
She spies and asks all day, and sits with her
As her intelligence of seventy, eighty.
It's her I mostly fear.

Ute (to Kriemhild and Brunhild)

Then love each other,
And let the ring that now your arms have formed
In your heart's first impulse, widen itself ;
Till by degrees it grows into a circle
In which you both with equal step and tread,
And equal joy do move around a centre.
You will be luckier than I have been ;
For what I could not to my lord confide,
That I had quite to swallow, and at least
I never of my husband could complain.

Kriemhild

Let us be sisters.

Brunhild

For your sakes alone
Your son and brother may, ere it is night,
Press on my lips the sign of servitude.
For I am unburnt as too young a tree,
And if you did not sweeten it, I'd hold
The shame that threatens me for ever distant.

Ute

Thou talk'st of shame?

Brunhild

Forgive me, pray, this word ;
But as I feel, I speak. I am a stranger

In this your world ; and just as mine would frighten
You if you entered it, so yours disquiets me.
Methinks I never could have been born here ;
And yet I am to live here ! Are the heavens
Always as blue ?

Kriemhild

Not always, but almost.

Brunhild

We know no other blue, but azure eyes,
And that in union only with red hair
And faces pale. And is it always here
So tranquil in the air ?

Kriemhild

Tempests arise

Sometimes ; then day turns into night, and lightning
And thunder rage.

Brunhild

Oh, if that only came

To-day yet ! It would seem to me a greeting
From home. I am not used to so much light ;
It hurts me, and I feel like walking naked,
As if no cloak was thick enough for here—
Are these, then, flowers ? Red, and green, and yellow ?

Kriemhild

Thou ne'er hast seen them, and yet know'st the colours ?

Brunhild

But we have precious stones in all the colours,
Only no white or black ones ; but then white
Is my own hand, and deepest black my hair.

Kriemhild

So know'st thou nought of scent ?

[She plucks a violet for her]

Brunhild

Oh, that is sweet !

And does this tiny flower then exhale it,
The only one mine eye did never notice ?
I'd like to give it quite as sweet a name ;
But surely it possesses one already.

Kriemhild

None other is as humble, and thy foot
Would easily have crushed it, for it seems
Nearly ashamed to be more than the grass,

The
Nibelungs

So deeply does it hide ; and yet it coaxes
Thee to speak gently now for the first time.
So let it be a sign, that many a thing here
May yet be hidden deep down from thine eye
To make thee happy.

Brunhild

I hope and believe it,
And need it, too. Thou know'st not what it means
Being a woman, yet in every fight
The man to vanquish, and the strength that leaves him
And steams towards thee out of the spilled blood
To drink in with thy breath. To feel thyself
Stronger and more courageous, and at last,
When thou art surer of victory than ever——

[Turning suddenly]

Once more I ask thee, Frigga ! What was it—
What did I see and speak before the fight ?

Frigga

Thou seem'st to've seen this country in thy spirit.

Brunhild

This country !

Frigga

Wast enchanted.

Brunhild

Was enchanted !

But flaming were thine eyes.

Frigga

Because I saw

Thee happy.

Brunhild

And these champions seemed to me
As white as snow.

Frigga

But they were that before.

Brunhild

But why conceal it all from me so long ?

Frigga

It only became clear to me this hour,
Now that I can compare.

Brunhild

Then if I was
Enchanted when appeared to me this country
I must again become so.

Frigga

Doubt it not.

Brunhild

Yet does it seem to me as if I spoke
About the stars and metals——

Frigga

Yes, also!
Thou saidst the stars do shine much brighter here,
But gold and silver in return are blind.

Brunhild

Is't so?

Frigga (to Hagen)

Am I not right?

Hagen

I did not listen.

Brunhild

I pray you all, take me but as a child,
I know I shall grow faster than another,
But now I am nought else.

(to *Frigga*)

That was it, then?

Frigga

That's it.

Brunhild

Well, then, it's right. Then it is right.

Ute (to Gunther, who approaches)

My son, if she is yet too harsh with thee,
Give her but time! For to the rooks' and ravens'
Shrill screaming that she heard, her heart could not
Open itself, but it will surely do so
By call of larks and song of nightingales.

Hagen

So speaks the fiddler when he's got the fever
And cuddles his young dogs. So be it, then.
Grant to the virgin time for recollection,
But make the princess keep her word at once.

The
Nibelungs

Thine she's become by every law of arms ;
Then take her.

[Calls]

Chaplain !

[Walks on before]

Gunther

I gladly follow thee.

Siegfried

Stop, Gunther ; stop ! What hast thou vowed to me ?

Gunther

Kriemhild, may I thy husband choose for thee ?

Kriemhild

Ordain it as thou wilt, my noble brother.

Gunther (to Ute)

And I need no resistance fear from thee ?

Ute

Thou art the king. I am, like her, thy subject.

Gunther

So do I ask thee here among my kinsmen :
Fulfil my vow for her and me, and give
Thy hand to noble Siegfried here.

Siegfried

I can

Not speak as I should like if I do look
Into thy face, and of my stuttering
Thou just before hast surely heard enough.
Therefore I ask, as every hunter asks,
Only that I blow not thereby the feathers
From off my hat. Maiden, wilt thou have me ?
But that my simpleness should now not bribe thee,
And that thou should'st not wholly lack advice,
So let me tell thee yet, ere "yes" or "no,"
The way my mother usually scolds me.
She says, it's true I'm strong enough to conquer
The world for myself, but am much too stupid
To maintain afterwards the smallest molehill ;
And if I have not lost even my eyes,
'Tis only that it is impossible.
And willingly thou may'st believe the one,
But I shall certainly disprove the other ;
For if I only first have conquered thee,
Then shall I show that I can well maintain.
Well, then, once more, Kriemhild, wilt thou have me ?

Kriemhild

Thou dost smile, mother. Oh! I never have
Forgotten what I dreamed, and still the shudder
Is in me, and it warns me more than ever.
But e'en, therefore, I courageously say : Yes !

Brunhild

[Steps between Kriemhild and Siegfried]
Kriemhild !

Kriemhild

What wilt thou ?

Brunhild

As a sister prove
Myself to thee.

Kriemhild

Now ? Wherein ?

Brunhild (to *Siegfried*)

How canst thou
Dare to stretch out thy hand for her, a daughter
Of kings, and thou who art but a dependant
And vassal.

Siegfried

How ?

Brunhild

Didst thou not come as guide
And leave as messenger !

(to *Gunther*)

And how canst thou
Bear and support his doing it ?

Gunther

He is
The first among all knights.

Brunhild

For that assign him
The foremost place, and nearest to thy throne.

Gunther

In treasures he is richer than myself.

Brunhild

Fie ! Does that to thy sister give him a right ?

The
Nibelungs

Gunther

He's slain a thousand of my enemies.

Brunhild

He, that did conquer me, thanks him for that?

Gunther

He is a king, like me.

Brunhild

And yet did place
Himself among the servants.

Gunther

That's a secret
That I'll confide to thee when thou art mine.

Brunhild

Ne'er shall I be that, till I know the secret.

Ute

So wilt thou really not call me mother?
Put it not off too long, for I am old,
Also I bore much woe.

Brunhild

I follow him
To church as I have sworn, and will become
With joy thy daughter, but no wife to him.

Hagen (to Frigga)

Pacify her.

Frigga

You want not me for that?
If he was able once to overcome her
He also will succeed the second time;
But it's the virgin's right that she resists.

Siegfried

[Seizing Kriemhild's hand]

That I at once may prove myself a king,
So do I give to thee the Nieblungs' treasure.
Now grant me what's my right and is thy duty.

[He kisses her]

Hagen

To the cathedral!

Frigga

Has he the Nieblungs' treasure?

Hagen
Thou hear'st it? Trumpets!

The
Niebelungs

Frigga

And the Balmung blade?

Hagen

Why not? Hallo, now sound the wedding in!

[Roaring music. All out]

SCENE VII

[The Hall. Truchs and Wulf appear. Dwarfs carry treasures across the stage]

Truchs

I stand to Kriemhild!

Wulf

And to Brunhild I!

Truchs

And why an' it please thee?

Wulf

How could'st thou get
Thy tournament together, if we all
Were to uphold one colour?

Truchs

That's a reason
Which I must not dispute, but else it were
Sheer madness.

Wulf

Ho! Do not say that too loud,
For many are who to the stranger swear.

Truchs

They are as different as day and night.

Wulf

Who does deny it? Yet some love the night.

[Points to the dwarfs]

What carry they?

Truchs

I think it is the treasure;
For Siegfried had it from the Niebelungs

The
Niebelungs

When he did call them here as his retinue
Brought up at once, and as I hear, it is
Destined to be the jointure for Kriemhild.

Wulf

These dwarfs are fiends! Hollow in the back!
If one's thrown down, there lies a baking trough.

Truchs

They also burrow with the tribe of worms
Beneath the earth, and in the mountain caves,
And are the cousins of the mole.

Wulf

But strong.

Truchs

And clever. He need not seek for the root
Of the allroun, who's got them for his friends.

Wulf

[Points to the treasures]

Who does possess all these does not want either.

Truchs

I should not care for it. A saying goes,
That magic gold does yet more thirst for blood
Than even does a dried-up sponge for water.
Also, these champions of the Niebelungs
Do very strangely talk.

Wulf

About the raven?

What was it, then? I hardly listened to it.

Truchs

A raven came, and sat down on the gold
When they did carry it to the ship, and so
Did croak, that Siegfried—for he understood it—
At first did stop up both his ears and whistled,
Did pelt it afterwards with precious stones,
And lastly, when the bird would not yet move,
They say he even threw his spear at it.

Wulf

That does mean much for him! For he's in truth
As brave as gentle.

[Trumpets]

Hark! that is for us!

They all are gath'ring. Hie, Brunhild!

Truchs

Hie, Kriemhild!

The
Nibelungs

[Exit. Other knights that have collected meanwhile join
and repeat the cry. It gets gradually darker]

SCENE VIII

[Hagen and Siegfried enter]

Siegfried

What wilt thou, Hagen? Why hast thou been calling
Me from the banquet off? I never shall
Sit thus again as I do sit to-day;
So grant me then this day, I surely have
Deserved it from you.

Hagen

There's yet more to do.

Siegfried

Put it off for to-morrow. Each minute's worth
A year to me to-day. I can yet count
The words that I have spoken with my bride,
So grant me then the evening for my wife.

Hagen

Lovers and drunkards I have ne'er disturbed
Yet without need. It is no use for thee
To struggle, for thou must. What Brunhild spoke
Thou surely heard'st, and how she keeps her wedding
Thou also seest: she sits at table crying.

Siegfried

How can I alter it?

Hagen

That she will keep
What she did vow I never doubt at all,
And that the shame would be indelible
Still less, that must be evident to thee?

Siegfried

And what results therefrom?

Hagen

That thou must tame her.

[Gunther approaches]

Siegfried

Hagen

Listen to me. The king goes with her
Into their chamber. With the cap thou follow'st.
He does demand, ere she her kerchief raises,
Impatiently a kiss. She does refuse.
He struggles with her. She only laughs and triumphs.
He then puts out, as if by chance, the light,
And cries : so far the joke, and now in earnest.
It will be different here than on the ship !
Then dost thou seize and show thyself her master
Till she implores for grace, e'en for her life.
Has that been done, then will the king make her
Swear e'er to be his most submissive servant,
And thou dost then depart as thou hast come.

Gunther

Art willing thou to do me this last service ?
I ne'er shall ask another one of thee.

Hagen

He will, and must. It was he that began it,
So he must end it.

Siegfried

Even if I would—
And truly you demand a deed of me—
That I well might, on any other day
Than on my wedding day, refuse to you.
But how could I ? What say I to Kriemhild ?
Already now she's so much to forgive me,
That truly burns the ground beneath my feet :
Did I once more want to repeat the fault,
She never could forgive it all her life.

Hagen

When from her mother does a daughter part,
And from the room in which her cradle stood,
Into the bridal chamber is to pass,
Then is the leavetaking a long one, friend,
And thou hast ample time. Therefore—agreed !

[As Siegfried refuses to take his hand]

Brunhild is now a wounded piece of game,
Who'll with one arrow let it run away,
A noble hunter sends the second after.
What once is lost, is lost, and gone is gone.
The haughty heir of the Valkyries
And Norna's lies now dying. Kill her quite,

Then laughs at thee a happy wife to-morrow,
That says at most : I had a heavy dream !

The
Nibelungs

Siegfried

I know not what does warn me.

Hagen

Thou think'st Queen Ute
Is ready ere thou art ! Rely on it
She calls Kriemhild once she has blessed and kissed her
Yet three times back again.

Siegfried

'Tis no, for all that.

Hagen

How ? If a messenger appeared this instant
And brought thee news, thy father's near his death,
Would'st thou not get at once thy horse, and would
Thy wife not drive thee up herself ? Well, then,
A father e'er so sick may yet recover.
But once that honour's wounded, and not healed,
It never more arises from the dead.
The honour of a king is like a star,
And all his champions are lit up by it,
And by it darkened. To the loit'rer—woe,
Who dares to rob it of one of its rays.
Could I have done it, I'd no longer ask thee ;
Myself would do it, and be proud of it.
But it has been begun by magic arts,
And therefore magic arts must end it too.
Then do it ! Must I kneel ?

Siegfried

I like it not !
Who would have thought of that ? And yet it was
So very near. Oh, thou thrice holy nature !
It nauseates me as nought else in my life,
But what thou say'st has reason, and so be it.

Gunther

I'll go to give my mother just a hint.

Hagen

No, ne'er a woman. We are three of us
Who have amongst us not one tongue, I hope.
The fourth in our covenant is death.

[Exeant]

ACT III

[Morning. Castle-yard. The Cathedral on one side]

SCENE I

[Rumolt and Dankwart appear in armour]

Rumolt

Three dead !

Dankwart

For yesterday it was enough,
Being but the prelude. To-day it will
Be yet quite different.

Rumolt

Those Nibelungs
Are all provided with their winding sheets,
Each one has got it with him, like his sword.

Dankwart

They have strange usages up in the North,
For as the mountains are becoming wilder,
And cheerful oaks make room for sombre pines,
Man too becomes more gloomy, till at last
There's none, and only animals exist !
First comes a people that can sing no more,
This borders on to one that does not laugh,
Then follows one that's dumb ; so it goes on.

SCENE II

[Music ; a great procession. Wulf and Truchs among the
knights]

Rumolt

[He joins the train with Dankwart]

Will Hagen be contented now ?

Dankwart

I think so.

That is a public call as for the war !
But yet he is quite right, for the queen wants
Far different morning tunes to those the lark
Gives her to hear, when whistling in the lime.

[They walk on]

SCENE III

[Siegfried appears with Kriemhild]

Kriemhild

[Points to her gown]

Well? Thank me then.

Siegfried

I know not what thou mean'st.

Kriemhild

But look at me.

Siegfried

I thank thee that thou art,
That thou dost smile so, that thou hast blue eyes
Instead of black ones——

Kriemhild

Thou dost thank the Lord
But in His servant. Fool, have I myself
Created, and the eyes that thou dost praise
Chosen myself?

Siegfried

Methinks that love could dream
So strangely. Yes, 'twas on a morn in May,
When everything was sparkling as to-day
Thou hast two of the brightest drops of dew
That hanging were from both the bluest bells
Taken away, and carriest since the heavens
Twofold in thy sweet face.

Kriemhild

Love, thank me then,
That as a child I fell so cleverly,
For these my eyes were badly threatened then,
When I did mark my temples here for ever.

Siegfried

Let me but kiss the scar.

Kriemhild

Ardent physician,
Oh, do not waste thy balsam, for the wound
Healed long ago! Go on!

Siegfried

Well, then, I thank

Thy mouth——

Kriemhild

Only with words?

Siegfried

[Tries to embrace her]

But dare I thus?

Kriemhild

[Draws back]

Dost thou believe I challenge?

Siegfried

Then with words

For words! No, for what's sweeter far, than words,
For all thy whisp'ring of sweet secrecies,
As precious to the ear, as to the lips
Thy kiss, and for the secrecies themselves,
For lurking near the window while we threw—
Oh, had I only guessed it! for thy mocking,
And jeering——

Kriemhild

But with honour to remain.

That's how thou dost expound it. How malicious!
I told thee in the dark! Wilt thou now see
If I am blushing, if thou dost by day
Repeat it now? My blood is far too silly,
It mounts and falls too quickly, and my mother
Compares me often to a tree of roses
That bears white and red roses on one branch.
Else hadst thou heard not anything of this;
But I did feel how burning were my cheeks
When yestermorn my brother teased me so,
So I my misdeed did confess to thee!

Siegfried

That he to-day yet might hit the best stag.

Kriemhild

And miss it. Yes! That I do wish also.
Thou seem'st to be just like my uncle Hagen,
Who, if one 'broiders a new gown for him
And lays it secretly before his bed,
But notices it if it's too tight.

Siegfried

But why?

Kriemhild

Thou only seest what God and nature have
Done for me, and my own desert escapes
Thee, for that does begin but with my dress,
And not my girdle even strikes thine eye.

Siegfried

Well, that is bright! But I would much prefer
To wind the heavenly rainbow round thy waist;
Methinks that suits thee and thou suitest it.

Kriemhild

Then give it me at night, then I shall change,
But do not throw it down as thou didst this,
I nearly might have overlooked thy gift.

Siegfried

What dost thou say?

Kriemhild

Were it not for the stones
So it might haply lie yet 'neath the table,
But truly fire cannot hide itself.

Siegfried

That was from me?

Kriemhild

Surely.

Siegfried

Thou dream'st, Kriemhild,

Kriemhild

I found it in the chamber.

Siegfried

Where thy mother
May possibly have lost it.

Kriemhild

Not my mother.
Oh, no; I know her jewels. I did think

It might have come out of the Nieblungs' treasure,
And I to please thee put it quickly on.

The
Niebelungs

Siegfried

For that I thank thee, but I know it not.

Kriemhild

[Takes off the girdle]

Then make again room for the golden braid
That thou didst cover! I was quite attired
And only strapped it on, thereby my mother
And thee jointly to honour, for the braid
Is from my mother!

Siegfried

That is very strange!—
Thou found'st it on the ground?

Kriemhild

I did.

Siegfried

And crushed?

Kriemhild

Dost see thou knowest it! The second joke
Succeeded as the first, and I have only
The work twice over.

[She tries to put the belt on again]

Siegfried

For God's own sake, no!

Kriemhild

Art thou in earnest?

Siegfried

[Aside]

She did seek my hands

To bind.

Kriemhild

Thou laugh'st not?

Siegfried

I became then furious,
And used at last my strength.

Kriemhild

Not even yet?

The
Nibelungs

Siegfried

[Aside]

I tore something from her.

Kriemhild

Soon I'll believe it.

Siegfried

[Aside]

That I did push, for she did try to seize it
Into my bosom—give it to me, give it,
No well is deep enough to hide it, then
A stone to it and down into the Rhine.

Kriemhild

Siegfried!

Siegfried

I dropped it then!—Oh, give it me!

Kriemhild

How has it come into thy hands?

Siegfried

That is

A secret terribly unfortunate,
Ask not to have a part in it.

Kriemhild

Thou hast

Confided to me one much more important,
I know the only spot where death can strike thee.

Siegfried

I guard that all alone.

Kriemhild

The other's guarded

Haply by two?

Siegfried

[Aside]

Curse it! I hurried too much!

Kriemhild

[Covers her face]

Thou swor'st a vow to me. Why didst thou do it?
I had not asked thee for it.

Siegfried

By my life
I ne'er have known a woman.

Kriemhild

[Holds up the girdle]

Siegfried

I was bound
With that.

Kriemhild

It would be easier believed
If spoken by a lion.

Siegfried

Yet it's true.

Kriemhild

That hurts. A man like thee can ne'er a fault
Commit, that, may it be ever so bad,
Would not suit him yet better than the lie
With which he tries to cover it.

[Gunther and Brunhild appear]

Siegfried

Away!
They come.

Kriemhild

Who comes? Brunhild? Knows she the girdle?

Siegfried

Do only hide it, pray.

Kriemhild

No, I shall show it.

Siegfried

If thou dost hide it, I will tell thee all.

Kriemhild

[Hides the girdle]

She really does know it?

Siegfried

Hear me, then.

[Both join the train]

Brunhild

Was that not Kriemhild?

Gunther

Yes.

Brunhild

Yet stay here? How long will she

Gunther

She will probably leave soon,
For Siegfried must go home.

Brunhild

I give him leave
And make a present him of the farewell.

Gunther

Dost thou detest him so?

Brunhild

I cannot see
Thy noble sister so demean herself.

Gunther

She does like thee.

Brunhild

No, no; thou art a man!
That name that once so hostile sounded, now
Fills me with pride and joy! Yes, Gunther, I
Am wonderfully changed. Dost thou not see it?
I could now ask thee something, and for all that
I do it not.

Gunther

Thou art my noble wife.

Brunhild

I like to hear thee call me that, and nearly
As strange does it seem now to me, that I
The horse did mount, and throw the weighty spear,
As if I saw thee turn the roasting spit!
I do not want to see again my armour,
Also my shield is all too heavy for me.

I wanted to put it aside, and had
To ask the maid's assistance. I would now
Much rather listen how the spiders weave
And how the little birds do build their nests,
Than accompany thee !

Gunther

This time it must be.

Brunhild

I know why. Do forgive. 'Twas generous
What I did take for weakness. Thou would'st not
Make me ashamed, when I there on the ship
Resisted so unkindly ! None of it
Was in my heart, and therefore did the strength
That only just in one of nature's fancies,
Had gone astray to me, return to thee.

Gunther

Do make it up, as thou art now so gentle,
Also with Siegfried.

Brunhild

Him thou must not name.

Gunther

Thou hast no reason to bear him a grudge.

Brunhild

Neither have I any. If a king so far
Himself does lower, as to serve as guide
And messengers relieve, so it is truly
As strange as if a man allowed the saddle
Strapped on his own back instead of the horses,
Or haply barked and hunted for the dog.
But if it pleases him, it's nought to me.

Gunther

It was not so.

Brunhild

Also, it's all the funnier
When all the while he high with head and limbs
Does tower o'er the others, that one thinks
He does collect the crowns of all the kings
In all the world, to forge a single one
Out of them all and show one majesty
For the first time in its entire glory.
For that is true, as long as on the earth
Yet more than one does shine, none is quite round,

The
Nibelungs

And instead of the sun ring, thou dost carry
Also but a pale half moon on thy brow.

Gunther

Seest thou, that thou with other eyes already
Hast gazed at him.

Brunhild

I greeted him before thee?
Then that avenge! And challenge him and kill him.

Gunther

Brunhild! He is the husband of my sister,
And his blood is the same as mine.

Brunhild

Then fight
With him, and throw him down into the dust,
And show to me how splendid thou appear'st
When he is but the footstool for thy feet.

Gunther

That's not the custom here.

Brunhild

I'll not desist,
I must once see it; thou hast got the kernel,
The being, he the lustre and the figure!
This magic dissipate, that does the looks
Of all the fools chain to him. If Kriemhild
The eyes that she now by his side does raise
Nearly too daringly, also must lower.
So does it matter little; but I shall
Yet love thee different far, if thou dost do it.

Gunther

He also's strong.

Brunhild

That he the dragon slew
And vanquished Alberich, that does not reach
Yet to thee from afar; in thee and me
Have man and woman in all eternity
Fought out the last fight for their precedence.
Thou art the victor, and I do demand
Nought but that thou, with all those honours I
Did hanker after, should'st thyself adorn.
Thou art the strongest in the world, therefore
Scourge him as joy for me, out of his cloud
Of gold, that he'd appear naked and bare,
Then let him live a hundred years or more.

[Exit both]

SCENE V

The
Nibelungs

[Frigga and Ute come]

Ute

Well, Brunhild seems to-day more blithe already
Than she was yesterday.

Frigga

Queen, so she is.

Ute

I did think so, indeed.

Frigga

Not I! Not I!

Her mind does seem so changed, that I would not
Astonished be if also her whole being
Did change itself, and she'd got golden locks
Instead of all her black ones, that so long
To me have crackled 'neath the golden comb.

Ute

Thou surely art not sorry.

Frigga

I only wonder,
And if thou hadst brought up this heroic woman
As I have done, and knewest all I know,
Then thou would'st wonder quite as much as I.

Ute

[Goes back to the castle]

Do but thy duty.

Frigga

I have done much more
Than you can dream of. But that it's come so
I do not grasp; yet if she's only happy
Then I am silent, and will surely not
Remind her of the time that she's forgot.

SCENE VI

[Kriemhild and Brunhild come hand in hand, many knights
and people assemble]

Kriemhild

Is it not better to look on at fights
Than fight one's self?

The
Nibelungs

Brunhild

Hast thou been trying both
Yet, that thou canst compare?

Kriemhild

I would not try
It ever.

Brunhild

Then thou must not act the judge
So daringly.—I do not mean it badly,
Therefore thou canst leave yet thy hand in mine,
Also it may be so, yet thought this joy
Was destined but to me.

Kriemhild

What dost thou mean?

Brunhild

Surely none can rejoice that sees her husband
Succumb!

Kriemhild

No, surely.

Brunhild

Nor deceive one's self
If he did firmly in his stirrups stay,
But for his master spared him.

Kriemhild

No, nor that.

Brunhild

Well, then!

Kriemhild

From all that surely I'm protected.
Thou smil'st?

Brunhild

For thou art feeling far too safe.

Kriemhild

I can be so.

Brunhild

It comes not to the proof,
Also the dream is sweet. Sleep on, sleep on,
I shall not wake thee up.

Kriemhild

How dost thou speak?

My noble husband's only far too gentle
To hurt his kingdom's administrators,
Else had he turned his rapier long ago
Into a sceptre stretched o'er the whole earth.
For all the countries are dependent on him.
And dared one to deny it, I'd at once
Ask him for it, to be my flower garden.

Brunhild

Kriemhild, and what would then my husband be?

Kriemhild

He is my brother, and receives the stamp
Whate'er his weight may be ; one weighs him not.

Brunhild

No, he's himself the weight of all the world,
And just as gold does fix the price of things,
So he the value of the knights and champions.
Thou must not contradict me child, in this,
And patiently I'll listen in return
When thou wilt show me how to use the needle.

Kriemhild

Brunhild !

Brunhild

I truly did not speak in scorn,
I want to know it, and 'tis not to me
So inborn, as the throwing is of lances,
For which I never was in need of master
As little as for walking or for standing.

Kriemhild

We can begin at once if thou dost wish,
And as thou art so fond of making wounds
Let us begin with 'broidering. I have
A pattern by me.

[Wants to draw out the girdle]

No, I do mistake.

Brunhild

Thou dost not look as formerly at thy sister,
Also it is not friendly to withdraw
The hand that I had seized so lovingly,
Ere I let go of it myself ; for custom,
With us at least, demands the contrary.
Canst thou not overcome it, that the sceptre

Of which thou dream'st, into thy brother's hand
Is given? Thou should'st really, as a sister,
Console thyself, for of thy brother's glory
The half is thine; also I think thou ought'st
Before all others not grudge me the honour
Which anyway could never have been thine,
For none would have paid for it, as I did.

Kriemhild

I see how everything unnatural
Does e'er avenge itself, for thou hast love
Resisted as none ever did, and now
As punishment it makes thee doubly blind.

Brunhild

Thou speakest of thyself and not of me.
There is no ground for dispute. The whole world
Knows that. It was destined before my birth
Only the strongest one should vanquish me.

Kriemhild

I well believe it.

Brunhild

And yet?

Kriemhild

[Laughs]

Brunhild

Then thou art mad!

Is it thy fear's too great, that we too strict
Might be with our vassals? Do not fear!
I do not lay out flower gardens, and
Also the precedence I will demand
Once only, if thou wilt not be too stubborn,
To-day, here at the dome, and never more.

Kriemhild

I surely would not have refused it to thee,
But as it does concern my husband's honour
I shall not yield a foot.

Brunhild

Himself will he

Give thee commands.

Kriemhild

Darest thou to insult him?

Brunhild

Before me he stood back before thy brother
As vassal to his master, and refused
The greeting that I offer'd. I found that also
Quite natural, while I—'twas he that did
Call himself so—took him for a dependant.
But now it seems quite different.

Kriemhild

And how?

Brunhild

I've seen before, the wolf thus sneak aside
Before a bear, or also thus the bear
Before the ure-ox. He is a vassal
If also he was never sworn.

Kriemhild

No further!

Brunhild

Thou threat'nest me? Do not forget thyself!
I keep my senses! And do thou the same!
There surely must have been a reason for it.

Kriemhild

There was a reason. And thyself would'st shudder
Didst thou suspect it.

Brunhild

Shudder?

Kriemhild

Shudder! Yes!

But do not fear! I love thee even now
Yet much too much, and never so can hate thee
To name that reason to thee. Had it happened
To me, with my own hands I'd dig my grave
Within the selfsame hour. Oh, no! No!
Not I'll create the most unhappy creature
That on th' entire earth does breathe. Therefore,
Be proud and insolent; I'm mute with pity!

Brunhild

Thou'rt boasting, Kriemhild, and I despise thee.

Kriemhild

My husband's concubine despising me!

Brunhild

Put her in chains! Restrain her! She is raving!

The
Nibelungs

Kriemhild

[Takes out the girdle]

Know'st thou this girdle?

Brunhild

Yes! It is my own,
And as I see it now in other hands,
It must have been stolen from me by night.

Kriemhild

Been stolen! Yet no thief gave it to me.

Brunhild

Who else?

Kriemhild

The man that overpower'd thee!
But not my brother!

Brunhild

Kriemhild!

Kriemhild

Him thou would'st
Have throttled, thou virago! and then haply
Have fall'n in love as punishment with the dead.
My husband gave it me.

Brunhild

No, no!

Kriemhild

'Tis so!
Now do yet lower him? Dost thou permit
Me now to enter first into the dome?

[To her women]

Follow me! I must show her what I dare.

[She enters the dome]

SCENE VII

Brunhild

Where are the masters of Burgundy!—Oh, Frigga!
Hast overheard?

Frigga

I heard, and do believe it.

Brunhild
Thou'rt killing me! It could be so?

Frigga She said
Surely too much, but one thing stands assured,
That thou hast been betrayed!

Brunhild
She did not lie?

Frigga
The Balmung's owner 'twas. He near the lake
Did stand when it went out.

Brunhild
So he did scorn me,
For I was on the battlements, and he must
Have seen me. But he haply loved her then.

Frigga
And that thou know'st what thou didst lose by it,
I deluded thee.

Brunhild
[Without listening to her]
Therefore the haughty calmness
With which he looked at me.

Frigga
Not only was
This narrow land—no, the whole earth was destined
To be thy property, and also were
The stars to speak to thee, and even death
Had of its mastery been deprived o'er thee.

Brunhild
Speak not of that.

Frigga
Why not? 'Tis true thou canst not
Reconquer it, but thou art able, child,
To avenge thyself.

Brunhild
I shall avenge myself!
Scorned! Woman, woman, if thou in his arms
Hast laughed about me but one single night
Thou shalt be crying many years for it!
I will— — What say I? I am weak, like her.

[Falls on to Frigga's bosom]

SCENE VIII

[Gunther, Hagen, Dankwart, Rumolt, Gerenot, Giselher and Siegfried enter]

Hagen

What happens here?

Brunhild (to Gunther)

[Stands up erect]

Am I a concubine?

Gunther

A concubine?

Brunhild

Thy sister calls me that.

Hagen (to Frigga)

What's gone on here?

Frigga

You are discovered. We know

The victor now, and Kriemhild even says

He was so twice.

Hagen (to Gunther)

He has been chattering.

[He talks secretly with him]

SCENE IX

Kriemhild

[Who has meanwhile left the dome]

Forgive me, husband! I know I was wrong,
But if thou only knew'st how she reviled thee——

Gunther (to Siegfried)

Hast thou been ever boasting?

Siegfried

[Lays his hand on Kriemhild's head]

By her life

I did not.

Hagen

That believe without a vow!

He only said what's true.

Siegfried

And also that

Not without need!

The
Nibelungs

Hagen

I am not doubting it!
The "how" another time. Now only get
The women far apart, who yet are able
To raise the serpent's combs against each other,
If they, too, soon gaze in each other's eyes.

Siegfried

I shall be leaving soon. Come now, Kriemhild.

Kriemhild (to *Brunhild*)

If thou consider'st how thou hast provoked me
Then wilt thou too——

Brunhild

[Turns away]

Kriemhild

As thou dost love my brother
Thou canst not blame the means by which thyself
Wert given to him.

Brunhild

Oh!

Hagen

Away! Away!

Siegfried

[Leading Kriemhild away]

There has been here no chatt'ring, you will see.

[Exit both]

SCENE X

Hagen

Now stand round me, and let us pass at once
The extreme sentence.

Gunther

What is it thou say'st?

Hagen

Does here the reason lack? There stands the queen,
And cries her hottest tears which the insult
Does draw from her.

The
Nibelungs

(To *Brunhild*)

Thou noble, heroic woman !
The only one to whom I, too, bow down.
The man must die who has done this to thee.

Gunther

Hagen !

Hagen (to *Brunhild*)

The man must die, if thou thyself
Dost not between him step and thy avenger.

Brunhild

I eat not till the sentence is fulfilled.

Hagen

Forgive me, King, that I here spoke before thee,
I wanted but to show thee how it stands,
But yet thou canst freely decide thyself :
To thee remains the choice 'twixt him and her.

Giselher

So 'tis in earnest ? And for a small fault
You want to slay the truest man on earth.
My brother and my king, thou wilt say no !

Hagen

Do you want to breed bastards in your court ?
I only doubt that the haughty Burgundians
Will ever crown them, but thou art the master.

Gererot

The valiant Siegfried surely will compel them
If they do murmur, do we not succeed.

Hagen (to *Gunther*)

Thou dost not speak ? Well, then, the rest is mine.

Giselher

I part myself from this your bloody council.

[Out]

SCENE XI

Brunhild

Frigga, it must be my life, or his own.

Frigga

His life, my child ?

Brunhild

I was not only scorned
But given away, and haply also sold.

Frigga

Wert sold?

Brunhild

Not good enough to be his wife,
I was the penny that procured him one.

Frigga

The penny, child?

Brunhild

That is yet more than murder,
And therefore I cry vengeance! Vengeance! Vengeance!

[Exeant]

ACT IV

[Worms]

SCENE I

[Hall. Gunther with his knights. Hagen carries a javelin

Hagen

To hit a lime leaf, e'en the blind can do it ;
And I will venture that a hazel nut
At fifty paces distance I shall open.

Giselher

What makes thee bring out now such tricks as these ?
We know it long that nothing rusts with thee.

Hagen

He comes ! Now show me that you can look gloomy,
And can distort your face, if even now
Your father did not die.

SCENE II

Siegfried

[Comes]

Do you not hear
The pointers howling, and the youngest hunter
Proving his horn ? Up, and to horse, and out !

Hagen

The day'll be fine.

Siegfried

And have you not been told
That bears are venturing into the stables,
And that the eagles stand before the door,
When opened in the morning, if perhaps
A child runs out.

The
Nibelungs

Volker

Yes, that before has happened.

Siegfried

While we did woo there was bad hunting here.
Come, and the insolent enemy throw back
With me and decimate it.

Hagen

My friend, we must
Now sharpen our blades and nail our spears.

Siegfried

Why?

Hagen

Thou hast in these latter days too much
Caressed, else thou would'st know it long ago.

Siegfried

I do prepare my going as you know.
But tell me what it is.

Hagen

The Danes and Saxons
Again are on the way.

Siegfried

Are then the princes
Dead that have sworn to us?

Hagen

Oh, not at all.
They're standing at the head.

Siegfried

And Ruedegast
And Ruediger that I made prisoners,
And dismissed without ransom?

Gunther

They again
Renounced us yesterday.

Siegfried

Their messenger—
Into how many pieces have you hewn him?
And has each vulture had its share of it?

Hagen

'Tis thou that speak'st like this?

Siegfried

The
Nibelungs

Who serves such snakes
Will be as they are, crushed. Hell and devil,
I now feel my first fury ! I believed
Often that I was hating, but I erred :
I only then loved less. I cannot hate
Aught but the breach of faith and treachery,
Hypocrisy, and all the cowardly vices
On which it crawls about, just as the spider
Does on its hollow legs. Can it be possible
That such brave men—for that they surely were—
Could so defile themselves ? Dear cousins all,
Do not so coldly stand and look at me
As if I raving were, and small and large
Did but confound. Till now, to all of us,
Was no injustice done. Strike out the bill
Composedly, until this latest item
Only these two are guilty.

Giselher

It is shameful ;
It sounds yet in my ear how they did praise thee.
When did this messenger then come ?

Hagen

Thou hast
Also not seen it then ? Well, then, he trundled
Quickly away as soon as he had done,
And ne'er looked round for his messenger's fee.

Siegfried

Oh, fie ! that you not for his impudence
Did chastise him ! A raven then would have
Picked out his eyes, and would disdainfully
Before his master spit them out again.
That was the only answer fit for us.
Here 'tis no question of a feud or fight
Ordned by right and custom ; 'tis a chase
Of savage animals. Hagen, do not smile !
With hangman's axes we should arm ourselves
Instead of our noble swords, and then
Use even those, because they are of iron,
And so related to the sword, if not
A cord sufficient is to catch those dogs.

Hagen

It is quite true.

Siegfried

Thou'rt mocking me, it seems.
I grasp it not, for else thou burn'st so fast.

The
Nibelungs

Truly I know thou'rt older than I am ;
But now it is not youth speaks out of me,
And also not the anger that 'twas I
That counselled gentleness. Methinks I stand
Here for the entire world, and my tongue calls
For vengeance, as the church bells do for prayer,
Also to judgment, what man is with man.

Gunther

'Tis so.

Siegfried (to Hagen)

Know'st thou the breach of faith, the treachery?
Into its face now look, and then smile yet.
Thou meetest it in honest open feud,
And thou dost throw it down. But much too proud,
If not too noble, utterly to destroy it.
Thou set'st it free again, off'ring thyself
The arms to it that it had lost to thee.
It does not push them back, nor snarl at thee,
But thanks thee, and commends and praises thee even,
And swears to be thy own with a thousand vows ;
But when thou, all that honey in thy ear,
Dost on thy couch lie down then wearily,
Naked and as defenceless as a child,
Then it does come along and murders thee,
And haply spits at thee while thou art dying.

Gunther (to Hagen)

What dost thou say to it?

Hagen (to Gunther)

This noble fury
Does but encourage me to ask our friend
If he once more would accompany us.

Siegfried

I and my Nibelungs we'll go alone,
For 'tis my fault alone this work should come
Now once again. As much as to my mother
I'd love to show my wife, for the first time,
To earn from her entire commendation.
It may not be, while yet those hypocrites
Have got an oven in which to bake their bread,
And wells to drink out of. I'll countermand
At once the journey, and this I promise you :
I will bring them alive, and then they shall
In future lie in chains before my castle,
And bark when I am coming, or I go,
As they are nothing but the souls of dogs.

[Exeant]

SCENE III

The
Nibelungs

Hagen

I'm sure he in his fury runs to her,
And when he's done I'll go and follow after.

Gunther

I'll not go on with it.

Hagen

What mean'st thou, King?

Gunther

Get other messengers to announce to us
That everything is quiet again.

Hagen

That will
Be done at once, when I have been with Kriemhild
And got her secret from her.

Gunther

Hast thou, then,
But bowels made of metal, that thou dost
Not yet feel moved?

Hagen

Wilt thou speak clearly, sire,
That I may understand?

Gunther

He shall not die!

Hagen

He lives as long as thou commandest. And
Stood I behind him in the wood, the spear
Already raised, then on a sign from thee,
Instead of the offender, falls a beast.

Gunther

He's no offender! Was it, then, his fault
That he had ta'en away the girdle with him,
And that Kriemhild did find it? It had only
Just fallen as an arrow, that did stick;
For one forgot after the fight to shake
One's self, and 'twas but through the clanking noticed.
Thyself, all of you say: was it his fault?

Hagen

No ; who says that ? Also, 'twas not his fault
That he the wit lacked to excuse himself.
He surely blushed already trying it.

Gunther

Well, then, what does remain ?

Hagen

The vow of the queen !

Giselher

Let her kill him herself, if she wants blood.

Hagen

We quarrel as do children. May one, then,
Not collect arms, even if one does not know
If one will ever want them ? And a country
One does investigate with all its passes.
Why not a hero, then ? I shall now try
My luck with Kriemhild, if it only were
That the most perfect trick we did think of
Was not in vain invented. She'll betray
Not anything to me, if he has not
Confided to her, and it stands with you
If you will use that, which I shall find out.
You really might do even, if you please,
What I do only feign, and in the war
Cover that spot of his where he is mortal ;
But e'en for that, you must know where it is.

[Exit]

SCENE IV

Giselher (to Gunther)

Now thou hast from thyself returned to faith
And generosity, else had I said
This game's not worthy of a king.

Volker

Thine answer
Is natural, thou wast thyself deceived.

Giselher

'Tis not for that, but I'll not quarrel with thee ;
Now everything is right again.

Volker
How so?

Giselher
How so?

Volker
I hear that our queen does go
In deepest mourning, and the drink and food
Refuses, even water.

Giselher
Alas! 'tis true.

Volker
What, then, is right? What Hagen spoke is true.
She does not seem created, before the breath
Of time, like others do, to melt again.
And therefore must it stand: either he or she!
'Tis true, thou art quite right; 'twas not his fault
That like a snake this girdle clung to him;
No, it was nothing more than a misfortune.
But this misfortune kills, and thou canst now
Only decide thyself, whom 'tis to kill.

Giselher
Then let that die that will not live.

Gunther
The choice
Is terrible.

Volker
I did warn thee before
Ever to take that road, but now this is
The only way.

Dankwart
And must not everyone,
After our law, stand up for his misfortune?
Who in the night does run his best friend through,
Because he carelessly carried the lance.
He'll not buy himself off with all his tears,
As, hot and fast, they may stream down from him.
It costs his blood!

Gunther
I shall now go to her.
[Exit]

SCENE V

Volker

There comes Kriemhild with Hagen. Quite disturbed
As he thought she would be. Let's go!

[All out]

SCENE VI

[Hagen and Kriemhild come]

Hagen

Down in the hall?

So early

Kriemhild

My uncle, I no longer
Can rest in there.

Hagen

Mistake I not, so went
Thy husband just now from thee; heated quite,
As if he were in anger. Is the peace
Not yet between you two again restored?
Does he, perhaps, misuse his husband's right?
Tell me, then I shall speak to him.

Kriemhild

Oh, no!
If nothing else did of that evil day
Remind me more, it were a dream already!
My husband spared me every angry word.

Hagen

I'm pleased he is so gentle.

Kriemhild

I'd much rather
That he should scold me; but he well may know
That I do that myself.

Hagen

Be not too hard.

Kriemhild

I know how heavily I offended her,
And ne'er will pardon myself. Yes, I'd rather
That I, instead of doing it, had suffered.

Hagen

And that does drive so early thee out here?

Kriemhild

Oh, no! that would much sooner drive me in.
Fear worries me for him.

Hagen

Fear! and for him?

Kriemhild

But there is strife again.

Hagen

Yes, that is true.

Kriemhild

False villains!

Hagen

Do not be so cross at once,
That thou wert interrupted in thy packing!
Thou lay'st the coat of mail then on the top.
What do I say? He does not even wear one,
And has no need of it.

Kriemhild

Dost thou believe that?

Hagen

I nearly laugh. And if another woman
Cried so, I'd say: Child, out of a thousand arrows
But one is meant for him, and that one breaks.
But thee I can but chaff, and counsel thee
Catch thou another cricket that chirps better.

Kriemhild

Thou speak'st of arrows. It is arrows just
That I do fear so much. An arrow's point
Does want at most as much space as a thumb nail,
To penetrate, and, for all that, it kills.

Hagen

Especially if one has poisoned it.
And those wild savages that pierced the dike
Behind which we have settled, all of us,

And that even in war we hold yet sacred,
They are well able to do this as that.

Kriemhild

Thou seest.

Hagen

But what does that concern thy Siegfried,
For he's invulnerable! Were there arrows
That, surer than the sun rays, hit their aim,
He would but shake them off, as we the snow.
He knows it also, and this feeling leaves
Him ne'er one instant. In the fight he dares
What we, who neither after all were born
'Neath aspen leaves, does nearly move to tremble.
If he does notice it, he laughs, and we
Laugh with him. Iron can into the fire
Go quietly, it will come out as steel.

Kriemhild

I shudder.

Hagen

Child, thou art too shortly wedded,
Else would it please me that thou art so timid.

Kriemhild

Hast thou forgotten, or dost thou not know it,
What has in poems been already sung,
That he is vulnerable in one spot?

Hagen

That I had quite forgotten, it is true;
But I do know, for he told us himself,
There was a talk about a leaf or so,
But I ask myself vainly in what sense.

Kriemhild

About a lime leaf.

Hagen

That was it! But say:
How could a lime leaf possibly have hurt him?
That is a riddle as none other more.

Kriemhild

A gust of wind did throw it down at him
While he was bathing in the dragon's blood,
And where it stuck to him, there he is weak.

Hagen

It fell behind, then; that he never noticed!
What matters it? Thou seest that thy next cousins,

Thy brothers even, who would e'er protect him,
If but the shadow of a danger neared him,
Do not the spot know, where he is but mortal.
Why fear? Thou dost torment thyself for nought.

Kriemhild

It is the Valkyries I fear. One says
They ever choose for themselves the best heroes,
And a blind marksman hits, if they do aim.

Hagen

Then were in need he of a faithful man,
His back to cover. Dost thou not think so?

Kriemhild

I should be sleeping better.

Hagen

Well, Kriemhild.
If he—thou knowest, he was near to it,
Out of the moving skiff into the Rhine
Would fall deep down, and that the heavy armour
Would draw him down unto the greedy fishes,
Then I should either save him, or myself
Would perish.

Kriemhild

Dost thou think so nobly, uncle?

Hagen

I think so, yes! And if in darkest night
His castle was on fire suddenly,
And he, ere waking, stifled half already,
Could not the way find out into the open,
I would on my own arms carry him out,
And did I not succeed, two would be burnt.

Kriemhild

[Wants to embrace him]

Thee must I—

Hagen

[Wards her off]

No! Yet I swear that I'd do it.
But I must add to it, since lately only.

Kriemhild

It is but lately he's thy blood relation.
And have I understood thee, thou thyself
Would'st—

Hagen

So I mean it. Yes! He fights for me,
And cedes the smallest of the thousand wonders
To me, that he performs when he does fight,
But I protect him!

Kriemhild

That I should have never
Expected from thee.

Hagen

Thou must show me, then,
The spot, that I can do it.

Kriemhild

Yes, 'tis true,
Here, in the middle, between both the shoulders.

Hagen

At target height.

Kriemhild

Uncle, you surely will not
Avenge on him, what only I committed?

Hagen

What art thou dreaming?

Kriemhild

'Twas but jealousy
That blinded me; else all her boasting would not
Have so excited me.

Hagen

But jealousy!

Kriemhild

I am ashamed! For if there in that night
Were only blows—and I do quite believe it—
Even his blows I do begrudge to her!

Hagen

Well, well, she will forget it.

Kriemhild

Is it true
She neither eats nor drinks?

Hagen

She always fasts
About this time. It is the Norna's week
That is in Iceland yet observed as holy.

Kriemhild
Three days already !

Hagen
What is that to us ?
No more. One comes.

Kriemhild
And?—

Hagen Does it not to thee
Seem good to mark his doublet with a cross ?
'Tis true, all of it's silly, and he would
Deride thee much, didst thou tell him of it ;
But as I now am watching over him
I should not like to fail thee.

Kriemhild
I will do it.
[Goes towards Ute and the Chaplain]

SCENE VII

Hagen
[After her]
Now is thy hero nought but game for me !
Had he but kept his counsel he were safe ;
But well I knew that it would not be done.
When one is as transparent as an insect,
That does seem red and green, as is its food,
Then from all secrecies one ought to guard,
For even do one's bowels blab them out.

SCENE VIII

[Ute and the Chaplain]

Chaplain
For that there is no likeness in the world.
You all want to compare and understand,
But here the signs are lacking, and the measure.
Throw yourselves down in prayer before God,
And if in humbleness and in contrition
You lost yourselves, then haply you may be,
And were it but for so long, as the lightning
Does stay on earth, drawn right up into heaven.

And can that ever be ?

Chaplain

The holy Stephen
Saw, while the madly infuriated Jews
Were stoning him, the gates of Paradise
Stand open wide, and he rejoiced and sang.
His wretched body they destroyed for him ;
Yet did it seem to him, the murderers
Who, all in their blind fury, tried to hit him,
Were tearing holes but in his cast-off gown.

Ute (to *Kriemhild*, who has joined them)

Take heed, *Kriemhild*.

Kriemhild

I do.

Chaplain

That was the strength
Of faith ! Now also learn the curse of doubt :
St. Peter, who the church's sword does carry,
And wears its keys, he reared up a disciple,
And loved him above others. He once stood
Upon a rock roared round by the wild sea.
Then thought he of the confidence with which
His Lord and Master had obeyed the sign,
And with firm tread stepping upon the sea
That threatened him with almost certain death.
A dizziness seized him, as he of this proof
Did only think, and so impossible
It seemed to him, that there he grasped a piece
Of rock, that he might guard against the fall,
And cried : Be it all else, only not this !
Then blew the Lord, and suddenly the stone
Did melt beneath his feet ; he sank and sank
And did seem lost, and out of fear and terror
Did he jump down into the open floods.
But they, touched by the same breath of the Lord's,
Had become firm, and carried him as earth
Does you and me, and he, repentingly,
Spake then : Oh, Lord, the reign is Thine for ever !

Ute

In all eternity !

Kriemhild

Pray, devout father,
That He, who changes so the stones and water,

Also protects my Siegfried. For each year
That at his side will granted be to me,
I shall raise up an altar to a saint.

[Out]

Chaplain

Thou'rt astounded at the wonder. Let me tell thee
How I came by my cassock. From the tribe
Of Angles come I, and as heathen born
Among a heathen people, I grew up
Quite wild, and was at fifteen years already
Girded round with the sword. Then there appeared
Among us the first messenger of God.
He was derided, mocked, and then at last
Was slain. Queen, I stood there, and gave him too,
Incited by the others, with this hand,
That since I never use, although this arm
Is not, as you believe, lame, the last stroke.
His prayer heard I then. He prayed for me,
And, with the Amen, passed away his spirit.
That turned the heart inside my bosom. I
Threw down my sword, wrapped myself in his gown,
And so I wandered out, and preached the Cross.

Ute

There comes my son ! Oh, could'st thou but succeed
In bringing back to us the peace, that from here
Entirely has gone !

[Exit]

SCENE IX

[Gunther comes with Hagen and the others]

Gunther

As I said before,
She counts upon the deed, as we on apples
When has the autumn come. Her old nurse has
To try and tempt her, a hundred corns of wheat
Spread silently about her chamber floor :
They lie there untouched yet.

Giselher

How can it be
That she thus sets a life against a life ?

Hagen

I too should like to ask that.

The
Nibelungs

Gunther

And with it
No hurrying or driving as with things
Which yet to time and space and human will
Are tied, is natural; no questioning,
No change of features, but astonishment
That one the mouth yet opens and not says
It is accomplished.

Hagen

Then one thing I'll tell thee :
She lies under his spell, and this hate has
In love its reason.

Gunther

Dost thou think so too ?

Hagen

Yet it is not the love that man and woman
Together ties.

Gunther

What then ?

Hagen

It is a magic
Through which her race wants to maintain itself,
And that the last giantess sans desire,
And without choice drives to the last of giants.

Gunther

What alters that ?

Hagen

It is untied by death !
Her blood does freeze when his gets chill, and he
Was only there to slay the dragon, and
Then go the same way as the dragon did.

[One hears an uproar]

Gunther

But what is that ?

Hagen

That's the false messenger
By Dankwart chased. Does he not do it well ?
He'll also hear it, who does kiss just now.

SCENE X

The
Nibelungs

[Siegfried comes ; when Hagen sees him]

Hagen

By hell and devil ! no ! and ten times no !
It were disgrace for us, and Siegfried thinks
Surely as I do. He's just coming here.
Now speak, thou may'st decide.

[As Dankwart appears]

'Tis true thy word
Does alter nothing more ; the answer's given.

(to *Dankwart*)

Thou hast not saved the whip, I'm certain of it.

(to *Siegfried*)

But, anyway, put thou thy seal to it.

Siegfried

What is it?

Hagen

Now the dogs do beg anew
For peace, but I the shabby messengers
Had hunted out of our castle, ere
They even finished speaking.

Siegfried

That was right.

Hagen

The king does scold, 'tis true ; he says one could
Not know that way what happened—

Siegfried

Not know ! Hey !

I know it ; I ! Seize a wolf from behind,
Then he'll give peace in front.

Hagen

That's what it is.

Siegfried

What else ? You know it swarms behind their backs
With savage tribes. Well, they do never sow,
And yet do want to reap.

Hagen

Do you now see it ?

**The
Nibelungs**

Siegfried

Only you will not care to spare the wolf,
Because it's no time to defend itself.

Hagen

Certainly not.

Siegfried

Then let us help the foxes,
And let us drive it into the last hole—
I mean into their stomachs.

Hagen

Let's do that ;
But there's no need, it seems, we should get hot,
Therefore, let's hunt to-day.

Giselher

I will not come.

Gerenot

I surely neither.

Siegfried

Are you young and bold,
And want to stay away while there is hunting?
One would have had to bind me, and then even
I would have knawed the cord. Oh, hunter's joy!
If one could only sing.

Hagen

Dost thou agree ?

Siegfried

Agree? I am so full of grudge and fury
That I should love with everyone to quarrel ;
That's why I must see blood.

Hagen

Well, so must I.

SCENE XI

Kriemhild

[Comes]

You go to hunt ?

Siegfried

We do, order thyself

The roast,

Kriemhild

Stay here, my dearest Siegfried.

Siegfried

My child, one thing thou ne'er canst learn too soon :
One does not beg a man to stay at home.
One begs : take me with thee.

Kriemhild

Then take me with thee.

Hagen

That will not do.

Siegfried

And why not, if she dares ?
It probably is not for the first time.
The falcon here ! For her what flies, for us
What runs and jumps. That gives the highest joy.

Hagen

The one sits full of shame inside her chamber,
The other one would go into the woods ?
It were like scorn.

Siegfried

I have not thought of that.
'Tis true it cannot be !

Kriemhild

Then only change

Thy dress.

Siegfried

Once more ? Every one of thy wishes
Fulfil I, but no caprice.

Kriemhild

Thou art hard.

Siegfried

Then let me out. The air takes all away.
To-morrow evening I will ask thy pardon.

Hagen

Come now.

Siegfried

'Tis well. Only the farewell kiss.

[He embraces Kriemhild]

Thou'rt not resisting and say'st not to-morrow
As I do. That is noble.

Kriemhild

Do come back !

Siegfried

'Tis a strange wish, indeed. What ails thee, Kriemhild ?
I'm going out with no one but good friends,
And if the mountains do not fall on us
And cover us, there's nothing that can happen.

Kriemhild

Alas ! that is just what I have been dreaming.

Siegfried

My child, they're standing firm.

Kriemhild

[Embraces him once more]

Only, come back !

[Exit the knights]

SCENE XII

Kriemhild

Siegfried !

Siegfried

[Appears once more]

What is't ?

Kriemhild

If thou would'st not be cross——

Hagen

[Follows Siegfried quickly]

Well, hast thou got thy spindle yet ?

Siegfried

Thou hear'st,

They cannot hold the dogs now any longer ;
What is it I'm to do ?

Hagen

Wait for thy flax !

Thou shalt in moonshine spin it with the witches.

Kriemhild

Go, then ! I but once more did want to see thee !

[Hagen and Siegfried go]

SCENE XIII

The
Nibelungs

Kriemhild

I cannot find the courage all to tell him,
And did I call him back yet ten times over.
How can one do what one at once regrets !

SCENE XIV

[Gerenot and Giselher come]

You not yet gone? 'Tis God sends you to me!
You dearest brothers, let me now entreat you
To grant me but one wish, and if to you
It seems absurd : Accompany my lord
On every step, and e'er stay at his back.

Gerenot

We do not go ; we have no wish for it.

Kriemhild

You have no wish?

Giselher

What say'st thou? We've no time.
There's much to settle for this expedition.

Kriemhild

And to your youth it was confided all ?
If I am dear to you, if you have not
Forgotten now that one milk fed us all,
Then follow them.

Giselher

They have gone long ago.

Gerenot

And then one of thy brothers is with them.

Kriemhild

I pray you !

Giselher

We have got to muster arms,
Thou'lt see it.

Kriemhild

Tell me, then, but one thing more :
Is Hagen Siegfried's friend ?

The
Nibelungs

Gereno

Why should he not be ?

Kriemhild

Has he e'er praised him ?

Giselher

He does praise already
When he's not blaming, and I never heard
That he did blame him.

[Exit both]

Kriemhild

That makes me more anxious
Yet, as does all the rest. They not with them !

SCENE XV

[Frigga comes]

Kriemhild

Thou here? Dost seek me ?

Frigga

I do not one seek.

Kriemhild

Dost haply thou want something for the queen ?

Frigga

No, no. She wants nought.

Kriemhild

Nought, and always nought.
Can she not pardon e'er ?

Frigga

I do not know !
To show it, she had never an occasion,
For she was ne'er offended. I hear horns :
Is't hunt to-day ?

Kriemhild

Hast thou perhaps ordered it ?

Frigga

Not I !

[Exit]

SCENE XVI

The
Nibelungs

Kriemhild

Oh, had I only told it to him !
Thou dearest man, didst ne'er a woman know,
I see it now. Else hadst thou never more
To the trembling creature, that from fear already
Betrays itself, confided such a secret.
I do yet hear the joke with which thou in
My ear didst whisper it, when I was praising
The dragon. Then I made thee swear that never
Would'st thou discover it to a human being,
And now—— Ye birds that here around me circle,
Ye pigeons white, that ever follow me,
Take pity, warn him, hurry after him !

[Exit]

ACT V

[Oden Forest]

SCENE I

[Hagen, Gunther, Volker, Dankwart, and servants come]

Hagen

This is the spot. You hear the waters rush.
The bushes cover it. And stand I there,
I'll pierce whoever does bow down to drink
Against the wall.

Gunther

I have not yet commanded.

Hagen

Thou wilt do it, if thou dost think it over ;
There's but one remedy, and never comes
Another day like this one. Therefore, speak,
Or, if thou'dst rather, then be silent !

[To the servants]

Holla !

Here rest we !

[The servants prepare a meal]

Gunther

Thou wert e'er adverse to him.

Hagen

I'll not deny it that I lent my arm
With pleasure, and would fight with everyone
That tried to push himself 'twixt him and me ;
Yet I think not the deed therefore less just.

Gunther

And yet my brothers did advise against it,
And turned their backs on us.

The
Nibelungs

Hagen

Had they the courage
Withal to warn and hinder? They do feel
But all too well that we are in the right,
And only shudder, as beseems their youth,
At blood that did not flow in open fight.

Gunther

That's it.

Hagen

Well, he has bought off death, and so
He has ennobled murder.

[To the servants]

Sound the horn
That all should now collect, because we must
Eat first.

[They blow]

Take but the things as they do stand,
And let me act. Dost thou not feel thyself
Offended, and wilt pardon what has happened?
Then do it, but do not restrain thy servant
When he wants to avenge thy heroic wife,
And save her! She'll not break the vow she swore;
And if her quiet confidence in us
Deceives her, that we shall release her from it,
And all the joy of life that may again
Be moving in her youthful veins, as soon
As the hour of death does overshadow her,
'Twill but unload itself into a curse—
Into a last and dread curse over thee.

Gunther

There is yet time.

SCENE II

[Siegfried comes with Rumolt and servants]

Siegfried

Here am I! Well, you hunters,
Where are your deeds? Mine on a cart would follow,
But it did break.

Hagen

I only chased the lion
To-day, but met it not.

Siegfried

I well believe it,
For I myself have killed it. There they spread!
A trumpet flourish for him who ordered that.
One feels now that one wants it. Cursed ravens
Here also? Let them blow their horns to bursting!
With every animal I've thrown already
After this swarm, and lastly with a fox,
But they'll not move; and yet in the fresh green
There's nothing ever so distasteful to me
As such a black, that does recall the devil,
That ne'er the doves do gather round me so.
Shall we stay here also the night?

**The
Nibelungs**

Gunther

We thought——

Siegfried

'Tis right, the place is chosen well. There gapes
A hollow tree! That I take for myself!
For so I'm used to upwards from my youth,
And do know nothing better, than a night,
The head dug well into the rotten wood,
Past in a doze between sleeping and waking,
And on the birds as they quite gradually
Wake one after another, count the hours.
Tick! Tick! Tick! Now it's two! Tuck! Tuck! One must
Stretch one's self. Kiwitt! Kiwitt! The sun blinks
Already, and will now uncloset its eyes.
Kikriki! Now get up, or else you'll sneeze.

Volker

Truly, it is as if the time did wake them,
While feeling its way onward in the dark,
That they may beat the measure for its going.
For in such measured pauses as the sand
Runs from the glass, and as the lengthy shadow
Of the sun-dial crawls along, so follow
The woodcock, blackbird, throstle, on each other,
And none disturbs the other as by day,
And tempts it to come in before it must.
I've often noticed it.

Siegfried

It's true. Thou art
Not cheerful, brother.

Gunther

But I am.

Siegfried

Oh, no!

I've seen before people go to a wedding,
And also walk 'hind coffins, and I can
Distinguish well their looks. Do as I do,
And act as if we'd never known each other
Before, and had for the first time, the one
Just as the other, by chance met in the forest.
Then does one put together what one's got,
And gives with pleasure, to receive in turn.
Well, then, I bring you meat of every kind,
So give me for one ure-ox and five boars,
Thirty or forty stags, and fowls as many
As you care to collect, not mentioning
The bear and lion, but one cup of wine.

Dankwart

Alas!

Siegfried

What is't?

Hagen

The drinks have been forgotten.

Siegfried

That I believe. Well can it to the hunter
Be happ'ning, instead of his tongue, a coal
To carry in his mouth at eventide.
I am myself to seek, then, as a dog,
Although regretfully I miss it's nose.
Be it so, then; I never spoil a joke.

[He seeks]

Here not! And there not! Where does stand the cask?
I prithee, fiddler, save me, else I shall
Change from the loudest to the quietest man.

Hagen

That might be coming, for the wine is wanting.

Siegfried

The devil take your hunting, if I am
Not to be kept as every hunter should be!
Who was it that had to provide the drinks?

Hagen

'Twas I. But I knew not where it should go,
And sent it to the Spessart, where probably
The throats are lacking.

Siegfried

Thank thee, then, who may !
Is there not even water here? Is one
To drink the evening dew, and lick the drops
From off the leaves?

The
Nibelungs

Hagen

Shut only first thy mouth,
Then will thy ear console thee.

Siegfried

[Listens]

Yes, it rushes !

Be welcome, jet ! 'Tis true, I love thee more
When thou, instead so straight out of the stone
To gush and jump into my mouth, would'st take
The curled, roundabout way through the grape.
For thou bring'st many things back from thy journey,
That fill our head with cheerful foolishness.
But be praised, even so.

[He goes towards the fountain]

But no, I'll first

Do penance, and you'll witness that I did so.
I am the thirstiest of all of you,
And yet will drink but as the last, because
I have been just a little hard with Kriemhild.

Hagen

Then I'll begin.

[He goes to the fountain]

Siegfried (to *Gunther*)

Do brighten up thy face,
I have a means to reconcile Brunhild.
Thou hast not long to wait for the first kiss,
And until then I'll abstain as thyself.

Hagen

[Returns and takes his armour off]

One has to bend, that cannot thus be done.

[Out again]

Siegfried

In front of all thy people Kriemhild will,
Before we leave, implore Brunhild's forgiveness.
That she has freely promised, wanting but
To leave while lasts the blush.

Hagen

[Returns]

As cold as ice.

The
Nibelungs

Who follows?

Siegfried

Volker

We eat first.

Siegfried

Well, then!

[He goes towards the fountain, but turns back]

First this!

[He disarms and goes]

Hagen

[Points at the arms]

Away with it!

Dankwart

[Carries the arms away]

Hagen

[Who has again taken up his arms and has turned his back
all the time on Gunther, takes an aim and
throws his spear]

Siegfried

[Screams suddenly]

My friends!

Hagen

[Calls]

Not quiet yet?

[To the others]

No word with him, whatever he may say!

Siegfried

[Crawls in on all fours]

'Tis murder! murder!—Yourselves?—While drinking! Gunther!
Deserved I that from thee? I stuck to thee
In trouble and death.

Hagen

Hew branches from the trees,
We want a bier. But see that they are strong,
For a dead man is heavy. Quick!

Siegfried

I'm gone,

But not yet quite!

[He jumps up]

Where has remained my sword?

They carried it away, Hagen, by thy manhood,
A sword to the dead man! I challenge thee
E'en now to fight with me.

The
Nibelungs

Hagen

He has his en'my
Inside his mouth, and seeks him yet.

Siegfried

I'm dropping
Just like a candle that's begun to gutter,
And yet this murd'rer does refuse the weapon
That could again ennoble him a little.
Fie, fie, how cowardly! He fears my thumb,
For I'm no more now than my thumb!

[He staggers over his shield]

My shield!
My faithful shield, I throw thee at the dog!

[He bends over the shield, but cannot lift it any more,
and raises himself staggering]

As if it was nailed down. So for this vengeance
It's already too late!

Hagen

If but the tattler
Would his loose tongue, that yet does gabble on
Crush with his teeth, between which it so long
Did sin without a punishment! Then were he
Avenged at once, for that alone it is
That has brought him so far.

Siegfried

Thou liest! That did
Thine envy!

Hagen

Silent!

Siegfried

Threat'ning the dead man!
Did I hit it so well, that I again
Am 'live for thee? Draw then, for now I fall
By myself, thou canst spit at me, as at
A heap of dust, I lie here——

[He falls to the ground]

You are rid
Of Siegfried! But know then, in me you have
Slain also your own selves, who ever will

Now trust you any more ! One will but chase you,
As I did want to chase the Dane——

Hagen

The fool

Believes yet our trick !

Siegfried

So, 'tis not true ?

Horrible ! Awful ! And can men lie so ?
'Tis well ! Then 'tis you quite alone ! One will
For ever curse you too, whene'er one curses,
And always say toads, vipers, and Burgundians !
No, you before : Burgundians, vipers, toads !
For everything is gone from you—your honour,
Fame, and nobility—all gone, as I am !
No measure and no limit's set to crime,
The arm is able e'en to pierce the heart ;
But certainly that is then its last deed.
My wife ! My poor, foreboding wife ! How wilt thou
Be able but to bear it ! If King Gunther
Does think yet e'er to practise love and faith,
Then be it towards thee. But better thou
Goest to my father. Dost hear me, Kriemhild ?

[He dies]

Hagen

He's silent now, but now it is no merit.

Dankwart

What shall we say ?

Hagen

The silliest ! Speak of robbers
That slew him in the wood. No one, 'tis true,
Will credit it ; but no one will, I think,
Dare call us liars. We stand there again
Where no one e'er can call us to account,
And are like fire and water. If the Rhine
Does think of lies—why it does overflow ;
A fire—why it has been breaking out,
Then we ourselves shall worry. Thou, my king,
Hast nought commanded, that keep well in mind,
I vouch for it alone. Away with him !

[All out with the corpse]

SCENE III

The
Nibelungs

[Kriemhild's chamber ; the dead of night]

Kriemhild

It is yet much too early ; 'twas my blood
That woke me, not the cock, that I so clearly
Did think to hear.

[She goes to a window and opens a shutter]

Yet has no star gone out ;
It surely wants an hour yet till mass !
To-day I long for prayer in the dome.

SCENE IV

Ute

[Comes in quietly]

Already up ?

Kriemhild

That does astonish me
From thee, who ne'er dost sleep before the morning
And on thy mother's right, that by thy daughter
Thou should'st be wakened, as thou used to wake her
Dost e'er rely.

Ute

I could not sleep to-night,
It was too loud.

Kriemhild

Hast thou, too, noticed that ?

Ute

Yes, as of men, when they want to be quiet.

Kriemhild

So I did not mistake ?

Ute

That holds the breath
But instead falls the sword. Walks on its toes
And knocks the stove o'er. Silences the dog
And treads upon its foot.

The
Nibelungs

Kriemhild

Returned. They have perhaps

Ute

The hunters?

Kriemhild

Once it seemed to me
As if one crept up to my door. Then thought I
That it was Siegfried.

Ute

And gavest thou to him
No sign of being awake?

Kriemhild

No.

Ute

Then it can
Also have been he. Only that would be
Nearly too quick.

Kriemhild

So did it seem to me ;
Besides, he has not knocked.

Ute

They did go out,
As far as I do know, not for the kitchen,
They wanted to give peace to our farmers
Who threaten us that they will burn their ploughs,
Because the boar reaps ever where they sow.

Kriemhild

Is't so?

Ute

Child, here thou art completely dressed,
And hast not got a maid with thee?

Kriemhild

I want
To find out which among them is the earliest,
Also, it did divert me.

Ute

I have all
Looked at by candle-light, one after another.
Each year sleeps differently. Fifteen, sixteen,

Yet quite as five and six. With seventeen come
The dreams, and at eighteen the thoughts do follow.
With nineteen come the wishes—

The
Nibelungs

SCENE V

Chamberlain

[Screams before the door]

Holy God !

Ute

What is it? What has happen'd ?

Chamberlain

[Enters]

I nearly fell.

Ute

And therefore all these screams ?

Chamberlain

'Tis a dead man !

Ute

How! What?

Chamberlain

A dead man lies before the door.

Ute

A man—and dead ?

Kriemhild

[Falls down]

Then 'tis my husband, too.

Ute

[Supports her]

Impossible!

(to the *Chamberlain*)

Light up!

Chamberlain

[Does it and nods]

Ute

Siegfried?—Death and murder!

Up, up, what sleeps !

The
Nibelungs

Chamberlain

Help, help !

[The maids rush in]

Ute

Thou poorest woman

Kriemhild

[Raising herself]

'Twas Brunhild counsel'd it, and Hagen did it !—
A light !

Ute

My child ! 'Tis——

Kriemhild

[Takes a candle]

He ! I know, I know !
One nearly treads on him. Thou heard'st just now
They stumble over him. The chamberlains !
All kings used to make way.

Ute

Give it to me.

Kriemhild

I'll put it down myself.

[Pushes open the door and falls to the ground]

Oh ! mother, mother,

Why didst thou bear me !—Oh ! thou dearest head,
I'm kissing thee, and seek not first thy mouth,
For that's now everywhere. Thou canst not hinder,
Else haply thou might'st do it, for these lips— —
It hurts too much !

Chamberlain

She's dying !

Ute

I'd nearly wish

It were so !

SCENE VI

[Gunther comes with Dankwart, Rumolt, Giselher, and Gerenot]

Ute

[Goes towards Gunther]

Speak, my son ! What is it's happened ?

Gunther

I'd like to cry myself. But how is it
You were informed? For through the holy mouth
Of our chaplain were you to have heard ;
I charged him yet to-night with it.

Ute

[With a movement of the hand]

Thou seest
The poor dead did announce himself to us !

Gunther

[Secretly to Dankwart]

How happened that?

Dankwart

My brother brought him here.

Gunther

Oh, fie !

Dankwart

I could not dissuade him from it,
And when he did return, he laughed aloud :
“ 'Tis thus I thank him for his farewell greeting.”

SCENE VII

[Chaplain comes]

Gunther

[Goes towards him]

Too late !

Chaplain

And such a man slain in the woods !

Dankwart

Blind chance did guide the robber's spear that way,
That it did hit the spot. And so can giants
Through children fall.

Ute

[Continually occupied with the maids round Kriemhild]

Get up now, dearest Kriemhild.

Kriemhild

Another parting? No! I grasp him so,
That you must bury me with him, or else

The
Nebelungs

Must leave him to me. I've the living one
But half embraced, that on the dead I learn now.
Oh, were it but reversed! I kissed him yet
Not even on his eyes. It was so new!
We thought we should have time.

Ute

Come now, my child!

He cannot lie on in the dust like this.

Kriemhild

Oh, that is true! All that is rich and costly
Must become cheap to-day.

[She gets up]

Here are the keys!

[She throws the keys from her]

There will be no more holidays! The silk,
The golden state dresses, also the linen—
Bring it all here! Do not forget the flowers,
He loved them so! Cut all—all of them off,
Even the buds of those that are yet coming,
For whom should they yet blossom! Put all that
Into his coffin, and on top my bride's dress,
And lie him gently down; then do I thus

[She spreads out her arms]

And cover him over with myself!

Gunther

[To his followers]

An oath!

No one dare hurt her more.

Kriemhild

[Turns round]

The murd'ers here?

Away! away! He shall not bleed anew!

No! no! Come here!

[She takes hold of Dankwart]

For himself he must witness!

[She wipes her hand on her dress]

Oh, fie! now must I not with my right hand
Touch him again. Is coming the poor blood?
No other look there! I cannot. No? So are
They but concealers, and the doer's missing.
Is Hagen Tronje here? Then stand he forth
And I'll absolve him, and will take his hand.

Ute

My child—

Kriemhild

Go only over there to Brunhild—
She eats, and drinks, and laughs.

Ute

It was but robbers——

Kriemhild

I know them.

[She grasps Giseler and Gerenot by the hand]

Thou hast not been present there?
Thou neither?

Ute

Do but hear!

Rumolt

We had ourselves
Divided in the woods, by his own wish,
Also it's custom, and did find him dying
When we together came.

Kriemhild

You found him thus!
What spake he then? One word! But his last word!
I will believe, if thou canst tell me that,
And if it is no curse. But have a care;
For easier grows out of thy mouth the rose,
Than thou to imagine what thou hast not heard.

[As Rumolt hesitates]

Thou liest!

Chaplain

Yet may it be. The magpies even
Have dropped down knives that killed what human hands
Were unable to reach, and what is hit
By such an aërial thief, because it's shining
Spoil did become too heavy, surely that
A robber can hit too.

Kriemhild

Oh, devout father,
Thou dost not know!

Dankwart

Princess, thy grief is holy,
But blind withal, and unjust. Here bear witness
The honourablest champions——

[Meanwhile the door has been closed and the body is no more
visible]

Kriemhild

[When she notices it]

Hold! Who dares——

[Hurries to the door]

Ute

Stay! stay! He only will be gently lifted
As thou didst wish thyself——

Kriemhild

Bring him to me!
Else he'll be stolen from me, and then buried
Where I shall never find him——

Chaplain

To the dome!
I'll follow, for he now belongs to God.

[Out]

SCENE VIII

Kriemhild

'Tis well! Into the dome!

(to *Gunther*)

So it was robbers?
Do thou come there, then, and with all thy kinsmen
For the death trial.

Gunther

Well, it shall be so.

Kriemhild

I said with all. But all are not yet here
Foregathered. Call him also who yet fails!

[All out, but men and women out at different doors]

SCENE IX

[The dome. Torches. The chaplain with priests sideways
near an iron door. In the portal Hagen's kinsmen accu-
mulate up to sixty. At last Hagen, Gunther, and the rest.
One knocks]

Chaplain

Who knocks?

Answer from outside

A king out of the Netherlands,
With quite as many crowns as he has fingers.

Chaplain

I know him not.

[A knock again]
Who knocks?

Answer from outside

Of the earth a hero,
With quite as many trophies as he's teeth.

Chaplain

I know him not.

[A knock again]

Chaplain
Who knocks?

Answer from outside

Thy brother Siegfried,
With quite as many sins as he has hair.

Chaplain

Open for him!

[The door is opened, and Siegfried's body is carried in on the
bier; Kriemhild with Ute and the maids follow after]

Chaplain

[Towards the coffin]

Thou art welcome, dead brother;
Thou seek'st for peace here!

[To the women, he parts from the coffin, by stepping between
them and it, while it is being set down]

Welcome ye also,
If you do seek for peace, as he does seek it.

[He holds the cross before Kriemhild]

Thou from this holy sign dost turn away?

Kriemhild

I do seek here for truth and seek for right.

Chaplain

Thou seek'st for vengeance, but that vengeance has
The Lord reserved Himself, for He alone
Sees what is hid, and He alone repays!

Kriemhild

I only am a poor, half crushed woman,
And with my locks I never can a knight
Be throttling: so what vengeance is left to me?

Chaplain

Why dost thou want to seek thine enemy?
If thou dost not want to take vengeance on him,
Is it not quite enough—his Judge knows him?

Kriemhild

I should not like to curse an innocent man.

Chaplain

Then curse no one, and so thou wilt not do it!
Thou poorest human being, out of dust
And ashes created, dispersed by the next wind,
Thou dost bear heav'ly, and may'st cry to Heaven;
But look at Him, who did bear so much more!
Descending down to us in human form,
He took unto Himself the guilt of all
The world, and expiated all the pains,
That from the first unto the latest day
Have been pursuing all the fall'n off creatures,
Also thy pain, and deeper than thyself.
He had the power of Heaven on His lips,
And all the angels were surrounding Him;
But our Lord obeyed unto the death—
Obeyed unto the death upon the cross.
He brought this sacrifice in love of thee,
And out of His immeasurable pity;
And wilt thou now deny Him what is thine?
Speak, then: bury the body, and turn back!

Kriemhild

Thou hast done thy work, now I will do mine!

[She goes to the coffin, and stands at its head]

Come, stand now here by me, and be my witness!

[The Chaplain goes also towards the coffin, and stands at its
foot. Three trumpet calls]

Hagen (to Gunther)

What is it's happened?

Gunther

A man has been slain!

Hagen

And why do I stand here?

Gunther

Suspicion strikes thee.



Act V.

KRIEMHILD: NOW OFF WITH THEE THOU DEVIL!

Sc. ix.

Hagen

That will be taken from me by my kinsmen.
I ask them all : Are you ready to swear
That I am no assassin and no murd'rer ?

All the kinsmen, except Giselher

We are ready.

Hagen

My Giselher, art silent?
Art ready thou to swear here for thine uncle,
That he is no assassin and no murd'rer ?

Giselher

[Raising his hand]

I'm ready.

Hagen

I'll remit you of your oath.
[He steps into the dome to Kriemhild]
Thou seest, I can be cleansed when I will,
And need not any more stand by the coffin,
Yet I shall do it, and will be the first !
[He slowly walks towards the coffin]

Ute

Look not, Kriemhild.

Kriemhild

Let me, he haply lives yet !
My Siegfried ! Oh, but the strength for one sound,
But for one look !

Ute

Unhappiest ! that is
Nothing but nature, that moves yet once more,
And terribly enough !

Chaplain

It is God's finger
That quietly dips into this holy fountain,
For He has got to write the sign of Cain.

Hagen

'Tis the red blood ! I ne'er would have believed it ;
Now I see it at last with my own eyes.

Kriemhild.

And fall'st not down ?

[She jumps towards him]

Now off with thee, thou devil !

Who knows, if every drop does hurt him not,
That does thy murd'rous nearness draw from him !

Hagen

Look here, Kriemhild. Thus in the dead it boils yet,
What dost thou want to ask from him who lives ?

Kriemhild

Away ! I would seize thee with my own hands,
Had I but got one who would afterwards
Cut them off from my body for the cleansing ;
For washing would not be enough, and could it
Be done e'en in thy blood. Away ! Away !
Thou wert not standing thus when thou didst slay him.
Thy wolfish eyes so firmly fixed on him,
And through thy devil's smile the thought before
Announcing. Thou didst creep up from behind,
Quite close to him, and didst avoid his look,
As the wild beasts do shun the look of man,
And didst spy out the spot, which I—— Thou dog !
What swore'st thou to me ?

Hagen

'Gainst fire and water
To protect him.

Kriemhild

Not also 'gainst en'mies ?

Hagen

That I'd have kept also.

Yes.

Kriemhild

That thou thyself
Might'st butcher him, is't so ?

Hagen

To punish him.

Kriemhild

Hast heard it e'er since heaven and earth have stood
That one with murder punishes ?

Hagen

The knight
I would have challenged, trust me for that ;
But he could not be parted from the dragon,
And dragons one does kill. Why did then put
This knight himself into the dragon's care ?

Kriemhild

The dragon's care! He had to slay it first,
And in the dragon he slew all the world!
The wood with all its monsters, and each knight
That let the furious dragon live, for fear,
Thyself with it! Thou gnaw'st in vain at him!
'Twas envy lent thy malice cruel weapons!
One will speak of him and his excellence
As long as human beings are on earth,
And also quite so long of thy disgrace.

The
Nibelungs

Hagen

Be it so!

[He takes the Balmung from the side of the corpse]

Now it's sure never to end.

[He girds the sword round and goes slowly back to his own
kinsmen]

Kriemhild

To murder, robbery!

(to *Gunther*)

I beg for judgment.

Chaplain

Oh! think of Him, who on the cross forgave.

Kriemhild

Judgment! Judgment! And if the king refuses,
Then he himself is covered with this blood!

Ute

Forbear! Forbear! Thou wilt ruin thy whole house—

Kriemhild

It shall be done! For here 'tis overpaid!

[She turns towards the body and falls down by the bier]

PART III

Kriemhild's Revenge

*A TRAGEDY
IN FIVE ACTS*

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

King Gunther

Hagen Tronje

Volker

Dankwart

Rumolt

Giselher

Gerenot

Chaplain

King Etzel

Dietrich of Bern

Hildebrant, his Master-of-Arms

Margrave Ruediger

Iring, } *Northern Kings*

Thuering, }

Werbel, } *Etzel's Fiddlers*

Swemmel, }

Ute

Kriemhild

Goetelinde, Ruediger's Wife

Gudrun, her Daughter

A Pilgrim, }

A Hun, }

Otnit, a Child }

Eckewart, }

Mute

ACT I

[Worms. Great Reception Hall]

SCENE I

[King Gunther on the throne. All the Burgundians. Hagen,
Dankwart, Gerenot, Giselher, Ute. Etzel's envoys.
Ruediger]

Gunther

An' it please you, most noble Ruediger,
So may you here your charge deliver to us,
For the Burgundians are assembled round me.

Ruediger

So I do woo then in my master's name,
Who everywhere does order and command,
And only before you comes as a suitor,
For Queen Kriemhild, thy sister. She alone
Deserves to follow her, that he has lost
With bitterest grief, and must a widower
Remain, if you refuse the only one
To him which can replace Queen Helke, and
Can reconcile the people that do mourn her,
As if each one had had a part in her,
With a new choice.

Gunther

If of thy kingly master
Thou canst announce us that he begs but rarely,
So notice, too, that we but rarely thank ;
But Etzel has the darksome throne of the Huns
Raised up so high, and has his savage name
Indented in so many nations' backs,
That I am pleased to rise and tell thee now :
We thank him, and we feel ourselves honoured.

Ruediger

What further answer shall I take him then ?

The
Nibelungs

Gunther

If we do not have our trumpets sounded,
And have not ere their time the St. John's fires
Lit up on all the mountains far and near,
Do not believe that our kingly pride
Represses the outbreak of our joy,
And that we ask for more than thou dost offer ;
But thou dost surely know Kriemhild's a widow ?

Ruediger

As Etzel is a widower ! 'Tis this
Which does assure their union hail and blessing,
And gives it consecration and duration.
They do not seek, as does unproved youth
In the first joy, unmeasured happiness—
They seek but consolation ; and if Kriemhild
Does also kiss the new husband with tears,
And in her arms a shudder seizes him,
Each thinks then quietly : that's for the dead !
And holds the other doubly dear therefore.

Gunther

It ought to be so. But though a long time
Has passed away since that unhappiest day,
When she the husband lost and I the brother,
My sister stays up to this hour more
Near Siegfried's grave, there in the convent Lorsch,
Than among us. She avoids every pleasure
As anxiously as does another, crime,
And were it but a look at sunset red,
Or at a flower-bed in time of roses :
How would she, then, contract new marriage ties ?

Ruediger

Do you agree to it ? Will you consent
That I myself the wishes of my master
May lay down at her feet ?

Gunther

We do not grudge
Her the new happiness, and the new honour
To us, and will about all else inform you
When our council we've been holding first.
And for the present take once more our thanks.

[Ruediger out]

SCENE II

The
Nibelungs

Hagen

Not for the world !

Gunther

Why not, if it's her wish ?

Hagen

If it were not, thou could'st force her to it,
For e'en the widow's hand thou'rt free to grant.
But I would rather see her laid in chains
Than going to the Huns.

Gunther

And why is this ?

Hagen

And why is this ? Already the bare question
Does make me mad. Have you no memory ?
Must I recall first to you what did happen ?

Gunther

[Points to Ute]

Do not forget——

Hagen

Thy mother ? Hypocrisy !
She's known it long. Why, if her hand she has
Since our chase not once more given to me,
She probably has never kissed thee either.

Gunther

'Tis so. And as thyself in thy defiance
Dost dare to dissipate the thinnest haze
Cov'ring the secret of our house ; as thou
Dost tread under thy foot the scanty green
That has been spinning o'er this bloody grave,
And throw'st the bones into my face ; as thou
Dost stifle now the last remnant of shame,
And mockingly point'st at the poisoned harvest,
That has been growing up out of thy sowing—
So have it, then, that I once my own breast
Do air, that I do curse thee and thy counsel,
And vow to thee, had I not been so young,
Thou never would'st so badly have deceived me,
And now—now would I with the greatest horror
Forbid thee that, what then I did allow
To happen, out of weakness, not from hate.

The
Nibelungs

Hagen

I credit that, for now Brunhild has been
Thy wife for many a year.

Gunther

My wife ! Oh, yes !
She is so far my wife, that she does keep me
From taking e'er another one, but else——

Hagen

Is here a secret being kept from me ?

Gunther

May be ! How she after the deed received us
When I brought her the first goblet of wine
Thou surely dost remember : she cursed us
Yet more appallingly than Kriemhild did,
And blazed up into flames, as she did never
Since she succumbed in fight.

Hagen

She wanted time
To get used to it.

Gunther

When I then reminded
Her that it was herself had ordered it,
She poured the wine into my face, and laughed
As I heard never laugh humanity—
Was't so ? Give me the lie else !

Hagen

Certainly ;
But then she did fall down, and everything
Was o'er for ever.

Gunther

Yes, as entirely o'er
As if she had her whole eternity
In that one solitary shortest moment
Consumed in advance, through her flaming curse ;
For she got only up as one that's dead.

Hagen

As dead ?

Gunther

She did, although she eats and drinks,
And stares at Runic letters. Thou wast right,
Siegfried was in the way.

Hagen

I thought— — but no !

The
Nibelungs

Gunther

The gentlest word draws ne'er a smile from her,
And had I Volker's lively mouth of songs
Caught from him in a golden hour, neither
The very hardest, even less a tear,
She knows no more the joy, nor yet the pain.

Ute

That's it. The nurse only covers it up.

Gunther

Dull, she looks on, as if her blood was buried,
And warming the cold bowels of a worm,
As one hears in old legends. That is now
More than its equals, and herself she is
Less, infinitely less, till in a hundred—
A thousand years, as blindly chance ordains,
Her foot does crush it. Gerenot, rejoice ;
The crown of the Burgundians thine for certain,
She brings no heir to me.

Hagen

That's how it stands !

Gunther

Thou wonder'st that thou hear'st it only now ?
I bore all quietly ; but thou to-day
Hast stood thyself the light upon the table !
Now open wide thine eyes and look around !
Inside the house dissension, ill-will, and
Shame outside. Canst thou see more in a corner ?
Then show thy find to me.

Hagen

Another time.

Gunther

But from the shame this wooing can release us,
And just as truly as a swan does dive,
When he the limpid water sees before him,
And washes from his plumage white, the dust,
So truly also I'll pursue this work
As I have ne'er pursued yet in this world.

Hagen

My king, one of two things can only be :
Either Kriemhild did love her husband so
As never has another wife loved hers—

The
Nibelungs

Gunther

I am the last to dispute this with thee ;
I know the difference !

Hagen

Then she also
Must hate us as no woman hated ever—

Gunther

Us? Thee perhaps !

Hagen

She haply does distinguish !
And if she hates us so, then she must burn
To prove it, for love's not so greedy even
Of kissing and embracing, as is hate
That's furious, after murder, blood and death.
And if long fasting hurtful is to love,
E'en so does hate only become more hungry.

Gunther

Thou canst know that.

Hagen

Yes, I do know it too ;
Therefore I warn thee.

Gunther

We are reconciled.

Hagen

Reconciled ! Well, by all the nameless gods !
If I were not thy man, thy truest man ;
If every drop of the blood within me
Did not so beat for thee as th'entire heart
Of all the rest ; if I, what thou wilt feel
When it does strike thee, not felt e'er before,
And more than thou oft in reality—
I would be silent now, and laugh not even ;
For e'en the warning irony contains yet
A speech like this deserves not. Reconciled !
Yes, yes ; she did at last offer her cheek,
For—

[He points at Giselher and Ute]

—this one implored daily and she cried,
And—did you drink? I do not think that even.
But with this all was the account not torn.
No ; for forgiveness came as a new item
To it, and only larger grew the debt.

Ute

Thou of my daughter think'st as of thyself !
Thou may'st offer the cheek, and only feel
It misses the mouth's poisoned teeth ; she will
Never profane the holy sign that does
Among all human beings end all strife,
E'er since the earth has stood.

Hagen

The Nibelungs

For gold did kill their father, the same gold
That Siegfried to the Rhine brought. Who would then
Have thought of it, before they really did it ?
Yet was it done, and will be done again.

Geremot

I like to listen in all things to thee,
Except in that. Thou didst transfer the hate
From Siegfried to Kriemhild.

Hagen

Thou know'st me badly ;
The country show me, from which no way leads
Back into ours, and I'll conquer it for her,
And raise her throne as high as she does wish.
But do not give her weapons, I must counsel,
When she herself can with them ever reach you.
Think you that I have robbed her of the treasure
To hurt her thus anew ? Oh, fie ! I honour
Her grief, and am not angry with her, that
She curses me. Who is it would not wish
A wife like her ; who would not have a wife
That's blind to all, as long as one does live,
And if one dies, yet quarrels with the earth,
That it's not shining, beaming where one lies !
I only did it from dire need.

Ute

Yet that

Ought not to have been done.

Hagen

Reconciliation

Was sealed but badly through it, that is true.

(to *Gunther*)

And if she does excuse thee, as thou shortly
Before didst leave the country, I know not,
And doubt it nearly, as thou didst neglect
To punish then the robber when thou cam'st.

But it could not be left undone, she would
Have raised an army with it.

Ute

She an army!

She did not think of it.

Hagen

Not yet, I know.

She did fill right and left the open hands
With Siegfried's gold, and worried not herself
If one came only once or ten times over.
That was the proper means, friends to enlist,
And keep them too.

Ute

That was merely done

For Siegfried's memory, and one will not
See e'er again the picture in this world,
When she, in her black mourning robe, her eye
So beautiful and serious, ever wet,
Did distribute the precious stones and gold
Among all that demanded, and not rarely
Did wash it with her tears, the highest misery
Chosen by Fate to give the highest joy.

Hagen

That is just what I mean. Yes, 'twas a picture
To touch a stone! And as favour oppresses,
And everyone, thereby to ease his burden,
Does seek some way to show his gratitude,
Then haply one among the many thousands
That had to gather slowly round about her
Might have asked her at last: "Why dost thou cry?"
To draw the sword then at her slightest sign,
Him to avenge, who did the dragon slay,
And the rich treasure brought into this country.

Ute

And that sign—dost thou think that Kriemhild would
Have ever given it? Is she no woman?
Am I her mother not? Is not the king
Her brother? And Gerenot and Giselher—
Are they not dear to her until this day?

Hagen

'Tis to me as if I heard Siegfried talk!
The ravens circle warningly around him,
But he does think: "I am here with my brother,"
And throws a fox at them, and hunts them off.

Gunther

Ah, well ! The question's now : Out of whose mouth
Would she like best to hear about it first ?

(to *Ute*)

From thine, I think ; so speak thou then with her.

[All out]

The
Nibelungs

SCENE III

[Kriemhild's Chamber]

Kriemhild

[Feeds her birds and her squirrel]

I have so often wondered at old people
For setting so their hearts on animals,
Now I do it myself.

SCENE IV

[*Ute* comes]

Ute

Again thy hand

In the wheat basket ?

Kriemhild

Thou know'st I'm for that
Just rich enough, and I am fond of them.
They're satisfied with me, each one can fly
Away as soon as it does wish, for open
The cage stands, as the window ; yet they stay.
The squirrel e'en, this bit of Sunday work
Of the work-worn Creator, that He sweetly,
As nothing else, did form, because the thought
That prettiest was, only came after vigil,
And that with me has turned into a child.
How could I help but love it !

Ute

Anyhow,
Only thou grievest us. Thou dost take from us
What thou on them dost squander, and we are
Yet more than they.

The
Nibelungs

Kriemhild

Who knows that? Did among
The human beings, anyone die after
The noble Siegfried? No, not even I;
But yet did his true dog.

Ute

Child!

Kriemhild

It did creep

Away under his coffin, and at me
He snapped when I did offer him some food,
As if I had enticed it to misdeeds.
I cursed and swore, but afterwards I ate.
Forgive me, mother; among human beings
I've fared indeed too badly, that I should
Not try if the wild woods do not contain
Much better sorts.

Ute

Cease now to speak of that,
I have to tell thee something.

Kriemhild

[Without listening to her]

I believe it.

Even the furious lion spares the sleeping,
For nature has too nobly formed it, that
It should destroy what not defends itself.
The waking, it is true, it rends, but only
From hunger, from the same necessity,
That sets one man against the other man,
And not because it envies him his face,
And does begrudge his free proud walk to him,
What among us turns heroes into murd'ers.

Ute

Yet stings the snake, and does not trouble to ask
If in front or behind.

Kriemhild

If one does crush it.

Also it cannot with the tongue it needs
To kill its enemy, swear to him that
It wants to kiss him. They wage war with us
Because we broke the holy peace of God,
And reconcile themselves with each one singly,
As soon as he does wish. To them I should
With my son in my arms have flown, for they

Protect the naked human being and
The outcast and forsaken, that his tribe
Renounces and betrays, remembering
The ancient brotherhood of the world's dawn.
I'd have confided to him in your language
What had been done to me, and they, in their's,
Whispered to him, how I could be avenged.
And had he then, when grown up into manhood,
The weighty oak club in his hand, stepped out
Of the dark forest, all of them would then
Have, like a king, followed him, e'en to death—
Yea, in a pressed crowd, from the proud lion
Down to the shyest worm.

Ute

They will also
There, on the Rhine, teach him how he's to curse,
For Siegfried's father has a right to it,
And Siegfried's mother cannot hinder it more ;
But better had it been if thou would'st have
Kept him with thee.

Kriemhild

Ah ! Do not speak of it,
If I'm not to begin to doubt thee also.
Hey ! Siegfried's son at the court of the Nieb'lungs !
One would not have allowed him his third tooth
To get.

Ute

Thou dost pay dearly for it, that
The consolation Nature offered thee
Thou hast pushed from thee.

Kriemhild

'Tis enough for me
That from the murd'ers I withdrew the child
As soon as I heard his first sound, and never
Shall I of Giselher forget the fact,
He did so faithfully help me with it.

Ute

Thou hast the punishment, for thou must now
To these attach thyself.

Kriemhild

Why thus torment me ?
Thou well know'st how it stood. Give a dead woman
The son against her heart and claim milk from her !
The holy well of nature rather will

Spring from her rigid breast anew, than could
My soul awaken from its winter sleep
That ne'er so deeply crept into the heart
Of any beast, as it had done to me.
For it had got so far, that my dreams mingled
With the awakening, and the morning call
Resisted of the merry cock : Could I
Indeed be mother? I do neither want
Anything from him, for he was not born
To comfort me. He has his father's murd'ers
To kill, and when he's done it we shall kiss,
And then for ever part from one another.

SCENE V

[Giselher and Gerenot enter]

Gerenot

Well, mother ; well ?

Ute

I've not yet spoke of it.

Giselher

Then let us speak.

Kriemhild

What sort of day is this,
That all my kinsmen are assembling thus?
Drive you death out ?

Gerenot

That happened long ago
One saves already for the St. John's fire,
And next will hang the leek upon the rafter.
Hast thou the calendar forgotten quite ?

Kriemhild

E'er since the cakes are not so much to me
Forget I every feast. Be you instead
Only so much more merry.

Gerenot

That we're not
As long as thou dost wear the mourning robes,
We also come to tear them off from thee ;
For——

(to *Ute*)

Mother, no ; it comes much better from thee.

Kriemhild

What is it, that this one so suddenly turns?

Ute

My child, if but as formerly thou would'st
Once more thy head hide here against my breast——

Kriemhild

God save both thee and me the bitter day
When that once more may necessary be!
Hast thou forgot?

Gerenot

Oh! nought of that to-day!

Ute

'Twas of your childhood's time I thought.

Giselher

Not get on thus. Well I have helped you often
And will help you again, whether you do
Then blame or laud me. You can

(to *Kriemhild*)

Hast thou not been hearing
The sounding trumpets and the noise of horses?
That means a noble king does seek thy hand.

Ute

'Tis so.

Kriemhild

And my own mother thinks it needful
To announce it to me? Yet I should have thought
The dullest maid that serves in our stable
Were enough woman to say "no" for me.
How is it possible that thou canst ask?

Ute

They offer it.

Kriemhild

In scorn.

Ute

But should I be
The messenger of their scorn?

Kriemhild

Not understand at all. 'Tis thee I can

(to her *brothers*)

You are too young,
You know not what you do ; I will remind you
When also has your hour struck at last.

(to *Ute*)

But thou— — I should my noble Siegfried yet
In death disown ? This hand that he did hallow
By his last pressure, lay into another ?
These lips that since he's gone kissed but the coffin
In which he rests, to sully thus ? 'Tis not
Enough I cannot get atonement for him ;
Shall I also curtail him of his right,
And sadden his memory ? For one does measure
The dead but by the grief of those who live,
And if the widow weds, then thinks the world :
She is the last amongst all other women,
Or she has had the last of all the men.
How canst thou think it ?

Ute

If thou dost disdain it,
Or dost accept, it always shows to thee
That from their hearts thy brothers wish thee well,
If thou canst anywhere yet find some pleasure.

Giselher

Yes, sister ; that is true. And it applies
To the king as much as to us. Hadst thou heard
How he the Tronjer scolded, who against it
Did declare himself, and how he was unmindful
Of his advice, and did what pleased himself,
Thou would'st forgive him now with thy whole heart,
As thou before hast pardoned with thy mouth.

Kriemhild

So did the Tronjer dissuade ?

Giselher

He did.

Kriemhild

He is afraid.

Ute

Child, so he really is.

Gererot

He thinks thou might'st hunt Etzel, for no other
Than Etzel is it, with all of his Huns
'Gainst the Burgundians.

Ute

Only just imagine !

Kriemhild

He knows what he deserves.

Gererot

But he knows not
That he in our midst is quite as safe
As one of ourselves.

Kriemhild

He haply may
Remember how a better one did fare,
Who also was amongst you.

Ute

Oh ! my God,
Had I suspected it !

Gererot

And had we all
Not been so young !

Kriemhild

Yes, you were all too young
To protect me, but also old enough
To shield the murderer when heav'n and earth
At once accused him.

Ute

Speak not so ! Thou hast
Honoured the Tronjer just as much as they,
And loved him too ! When as a child in dreams
The savage unicorn chased thee, or also
The Griffin frightened thee, 'twas not thy father
That slew the monster, thou didst in the morning
Jump at thy uncle's neck, and with a kiss
Thank him for deeds that he knew not himself.

Giselher

And if the servants old down in the stable
Told us of Thund'rer Thor, that we believed
'Twas he that threatened by the fallow shine
Of lightnings through the loft-hole, and he looked
Like Hagen quite, when he does throw his lance.

Geremot

Let, I entreat thee, what is past and gone
Also be once forgotten now at last.
Thou hast enough lamented for thy hero ;
And if in thy first grief thou hadst then vowed
To every one of his noble qualities
To devote a whole, entire year of tears—
'Twere over now, and thou free of thy vow ;
Dry therefore now thine eyes, and also use
Them instead of to cry, also to see,
Sir Etzel's well deserving of a look :
The dead no one can give back unto thee,
Here is the best of all the living ones.

Kriemhild

You know there's only one thing in the world
That I want more, and never shall I cease
To ask for it, till I've drawn my last breath.

SCENE VI

[Gunther comes]

Gunther (to the brothers)

How is't ?

Kriemhild

[Kneels before him]

My lord, my brother, and my king,
I beg in humbleness a hearing from thee.

Gunther

What does that mean ?

Kriemhild

If really thou to-day
As one did tell me now for the first time
Hast shown thyself the master——

Gunther

The first time !

Kriemhild

If thou not any more the crown and purple
Dost only wear for state, and sword and sceptre
In scorn——

Gunther

Thou sharply speak'st !

Kriemhild

That I would not.

The
Nibelungs

But if it's so, and if thy coronation
At last is followed by thy throne accession——

Gunther

E'en take it so !

Kriemhild

Then is a great day come
For those who've suffered heavy injustice ;
And I, as queen of all, that in the land
Do suffer grief, appear before thee first,
And cry out in complaint o'er Hagen Tronje.

Gunther

[Stamps]

Yet over again !

Kriemhild

The raven, that in the forest
Is flutt'ring round the spot where it did happen,
Does never cease to circle and to croak
Till it's waked the avenger from his sleep,
When it the blood of innocence saw flowing ;
It nevermore does find its peace again,
Until that of the murd'rer was shed too.
And shall a beast shame me, that does not know
Why it does scream, and yet prefers to starve
Than to neglect its duty ? My lord and king,
I cry out in complaint o'er Hagen Tronje,
And shall cry out complaint unto the death !

Gunther

That is in vain !

Kriemhild

Do not decide so fast !
If thou also dost seem with thy poor sister
And her misfortune to have quicker done
Than she, in happier times, did with thy hand,
When then the furious stag did tear it open ;
If to the grief that quietly can say :
“ Is aught on earth comparable to me,
Then I will laugh, and ridicule myself,
And bless all those that formerly I cursed ! ”
If to that grief thou coldly canst refuse
The smallest consolation, and dost frighten
It right away with gloomy brows : Consider
It once again, and then take back thy word !

The
Nebelungs

It is not I alone who cries complaint,
Th'entire country cries with me ; the child
Uses for it, the first breath it does draw,
His latest the old man, bridegroom and bride,
The one most precious, thou wilt shudd'ring see,
If thou dost please before thy throne to call them,
That every age and every rank appears ;
For as a thunderstorm, heavy to breaking,
Hangs this bloodguiltiness over them all,
And threatens more with every passing moment.
The pregnant women tremble to bring forth,
Because they do not know it's not a monster
That in their mother lap's been ripening,
And that the sun and moon still shine o'er us
Appears to some now as a wonder of nature.
If thou thy kingly office dost neglect,
They might at last begin to help themselves,
As once did happen ere there were yet kings ;
And if they all conspire savagely,
So haply they, since then thou art afraid,
Might be more formidable than the Tronjer.

Gunther

Let them.

Kriemhild

Thou speak'st as if I showed to thee
A coat with dried-up blood, as if thou hadst
Ne'er seen the hero in whose veins it circled,
Nor e'er felt the warm pressure of his hands.
But can that be ? Then colour thyself earth
Thus everywhere, as by the awful murder
At the Burgundians thou wast coloured. Steep
Thyself in deepest red. And the green dress
Of hope and pleasure cast off. Remind all
That live of this most nameless deed, and bring it
As one refuses the atonement to me,
Before th'entire human race !

Gunther

Enough !

With an intention I came here to-day,
That thanks deserves.

(to *Ute*)

Hast thou spoken with her ?

[On an affirmative sign from *Ute*]

Well ! well !—I will not ask thee for thine answer,
The messenger shall receive that himself,
So he shall see that thy decision's free.

I am in hopes that thou wilt grant him a hearing;
It is the ancient Margrave Ruediger.
Custom demands it, and he begs for it.

The
Niebelungs

Kriemhild

The Margrave Ruediger is welcome to me.

Gunther

I'll send him, then.

(to *Ute* and the *brothers*)

Leave her alone with him.

[All out]

SCENE VII

Kriemhild

He is afraid! Afraid of Hagen Tronje!
And Hagen Tronje, hear I, does fear me!
Thou haply might'st get reason. May the world
Revile me first, it shall praise me again,
When it does see the end of all these things!

SCENE VIII

[Ruediger with a retinue enters]

Kriemhild

Thou'rt welcome to me, Margrave Ruediger!—
Speak, is it really true, what one does tell me,
You're here as messenger?

Ruediger

'Tis true! But only
As Etzel's messenger, who not one sceptre
Did leave unbroken in the hands of kings,
The Niebelungs excepted.

Kriemhild

All the same,
I am therefore no less astonished by it.
'Tis long they praised you to me. An adventure,

The
Nibelungs

And Ruediger from others taking it
Away, were ever jointly mentioned here,
And if one can send you as messenger,
Then ought one really to save you, until
One does send for the best of all the earth.

Ruediger

That is just what my lord and king has done.

Kriemhild

How, Ruediger, thou dost a widow woo,
And com'st to meet her in the murderer's den?

Ruediger

Queen, what is it thou say'st?

Kriemhild

The swallows are
Flying away, the harmless storks return
No more to their nest of a hundred years,
But as a wooer does King Etzel call.

Ruediger

Unblessed are the words that thou dost speak.

Kriemhild

Yet more unblessed are the deeds I saw!—
Dissemble not. Thou know'st how Siegfried died,
And hadst thou but o'erheard the nurse's song
Wherewith they frighten on the Rhine the children.

Ruediger

And if I know?

Kriemhild

King Etzel's yet a heathen—

Is it not so?

Ruediger

At thy wish he turns Christian.

Kriemhild

Let him remain what he is. I will not
Deceive thee, Ruediger—my heart is dead,
Like him for whom it beat: but this my hand
Has got a price.

Ruediger

I offer thee a kingdom
That has on earth no limits anywhere.

Kriemhild

A kingdom may be little or be much,
How is't with you divided? To the man
The sword—is it not so? the crown and sceptre,
The 'broidered gown and tinsel for the woman?
No, no; I want yet more.

Ruediger

Whate'er it be
It's granted ere thou yet canst ask for it.

Kriemhild

King Etzel will refuse no service to me?

Ruediger

I warrant thee.

Kriemhild

And thou?

Ruediger

What's in my power
Is thine until the latest breath I draw.

Kriemhild

Sir Margrave, swear me that.

Ruediger

I swear to you!

Kriemhild (to herself)

They know my price, I am quite sure of it.

(to the *servants*)

Call now the kings!

Ruediger

So have I then thy word?

Kriemhild

King Etzel's also known in Burgundy,
Who hears his name thinks first of blood and fire,
Then of a human being. Yes, tis so,
Thou hast my word!—They say the crown must melt
From round his face, the glowing sword must drip
Out of his hands, ere he stops in his storming.
That is the man for whom it will be bliss!

SCENE IX

[Ute and the kings enter]

Kriemhild

I have considered it, and yield to you!
Sir Margrave Ruediger, give me your hand.
I seize it as if it was Etzel's own,
And from this moment I am queen of Huns.

Ruediger

I swear allegiance to you.
[He and his followers draw their swords]

Ute

And I bless thee.

Kriemhild

[Backs from her]

Ah, let it be! Thy blessing has no strength!

(to the *kings*)

But you—will you yourselves conduct me there?
As can demand the daughter of King Dankwart,
And can expect the master of the world?

Gunther

[Remains silent]

Ruediger

How? Not!

Kriemhild

Deny you to me my prince's right?

(to *Ruediger*)

Sir Margrave, do enquire of King Gunther
How I've forfeited it?

Gunther

I deny nothing,
But I have reasons now to guard the Rhine,
And therefore beg of you, Sir Margrave, that
You should my sister lead, and in my name,
Towards the lord she's chosen for herself,
And ask him to excuse me. I shall follow
You later on and see how she is placed.

Kriemhild

Thou dost give me thy kingly word for that?

Gunther

I have done so.

Ruediger

Then I do take her over.

Kriemhild

Now but a last walk to my Siegfried's grave ;
Do you meanwhile talk over all the rest.

[Eckewart steps forward]

My faithful Eckewart has cradled me,
And if also all others do forsake me,
He surely will not fail behind my coffin.

[Out]

ACT II

[On the banks of the Danube]

SCENE I

[Gunther, Volker, Dankwart, Rumolt, and a large retinue.
Werbel and Swemmel before the king. Later on the ship
with Hagen and the Chaplain, etc., becomes visible]

Werbel

Now give us leave at last, oh, noble King!
They do want us at home, for they at most
Do know how to distinguish from the lance,
The fiddle-bow, but know not how to guide it.
And they that now as rigid messengers
Are leaving, thou wilt see as merry fiddlers,
When thou dost hold with us thy festive entry.

Gunther

You have yet time. In Bechlarn I intend
To hold my rest with the old Ruediger
And until there we travel the same way.

Werbel

We know one that is nearer, and we must
Now hurry.

Gunther

Well then, go.

Werbel

We thank thee, king.

[Wants to go out with Swemmel]

Rumolt

Do you forget the presents? Why not wait
Till they come over here?

Werbel

[Turns back with Swemmel]

Yes, that is true.

The
Nebelungs

Rumolt

The ship comes near.

Volker

That I find very strange.
First they refuse the richest gifts, and then
Leave them behind!

(quickly to *Werbel*)

Is Kriemhild always sad?

Werbel

Did we not tell you that she seems as cheerful
As if she'd ne'er known grief.

Volker

Yes, so you said.

Werbel

Well then.

Volker

It must a country be of wonders
Where Etzel reigns. Who does white roses plant,
Plucks red ones, think I, or perhaps the reverse.

Werbel

Why?

Volker

For she seems so to have changed herself.
As cheerful none of us have ever known her,
She even as a child was quietly merry,
And laughed but with her eyes.

Rumolt

Now Hagen comes

With his last freight.

Volker

What way does show itself

Her cheerfulness?

Werbel

That you can see: she loves
The feasts, and she invites you to the largest.
You ask us strangely! Is it not quite natural
That she sends messengers, if you do not
As you did promise come by yourselves to us?
As much as she surpasses our women
In majesty and beauty, these do find

It very strange her family do not
Concern themselves about her, as if she
Were not their pride, but were their shame instead.
If that's not altered, envy will at last
Begin to doubt e'en of her princely birth,
And therefore she reminds you of your word.

Volker

Well then, we come now at the Solstice, and
As you can see—

[Points at the train of followers]
—with our entire court.

Werbel

Yes, with an army. For so many guests
Etsel is not prepared, therefore we must
Get on.

[They go to the ship that is just landing and disappear
quickly]

Volker

They're speaking falsely! That is certain!
But true it's also that Kriemhild must wish
To see us there.

Rumolt

'Twere foolish to believe
That she would talk her second husband over
To risk his throne, and his life for the first:
That contradicts itself, and makes one laugh,
Yet may be done what's possible in secret!

Volker

And as we do not need for ourselves
Our eyes—for what should we have there to fear?
So 'tis as if the Tronjer had a thousand,
And these at midnight even are enough.

Hagen

[Who has jumped out of the ship as it landed and has looked
on while it was being unloaded]
Are all here now?

Dankwart

Except the chaplain there!
[Points at the Chaplain]
He just collects his utensils for mass.

The
Nibelungs

Hagen

[Jumps again into the ship and rushes at the Chaplain]
Stand firm!

[He pushes him overboard]

Ha! There he lies like a young dog,
And my whole manhood does return to me!

Volker

[Has jumped after]

Fie, Hagen, fie! that was no deed for thee.

Hagen

[Secretly]

Mermaids I met, their hair was green as reeds,
And blue their eyes, who prophesied to me——

[Breaks off]

How? Canst thou swim, in spite of thy lame arm?
Hand me the oar!

Volker

[Seizes it and holds it firmly]

Hagen

The oar! Else I shall jump
In after him, and mailed as I am!

[He takes the oar and strikes into the water]

Too late! That is a fish!—So, then, 'tis true,
And not malignity!

Chaplain

King, fare thee well!

I'm going back!

Hagen

And I——

[Draws his sword and smashes the ship]

Gunther

Hast lost thy senses,
That thou dost smash the ship?

Hagen

Queen Ute has
Dreamed far too badly, but that every man
Should follow thee with joy to Etzel's feast;
But now thou'rt certain even of the last.

Gunther

And do I keep one that a dream does frighten?



ACT II.

HAGEN DRAWS HIS SWORD & SMASHES THE SHIP.

SCENE I.

Volker

It was not that? What is it?

Hagen

Stand aside
That none may hear us. For to thee alone
I will confide it.

[Secretly]

Mermaids did I meet,
As I before did go to seek the ship,
There were they floating over an old fountain
And birds resembled, hopping in the fog,
Now visible, now swallowed by blue vapour.
I nearer crept, then they flew slyly off ;
But I did tear their dresses off from them,
And coaxingly they called, while in their locks
They wrapped themselves, and nestled in a lime tree :
If thou return'st the spoil to us, we then
Will prophesy to thee, we know what is
Going to happen to you, and will truly
Announce it to thee ! I did let the dresses
Flutter high in the wind and nodded to them ;
Then they began to sing, and ne'er heard I
A song more beautiful, of happiness,
And victory, and all that one can wish.

Volker

That is a better omen than thou think'st !
As the insect of sunshine and of rain
So have they certain scent of destiny !
But they dislike to speak, for every word
They pay for with an entire year of life,
And ancient they become, as sun and moon
In heaven, but immortal they are not.

Hagen

So much more cursed then ! I threw the dresses
With pleasure down again, and rushed away.
But then behind me did resound a laugh
As horribly repulsive, and as ugly
As if it came from a thousand frogs and toads
In a morass, and, shudd'ring, I looked round.
What was it? 'Gain the women, but this time
In hideous shape. They made faces at me,
And in a strangely smacking tone, as if
'Stead of a bird, was speaking now the fish
In which their body is supposed to end,
Began to mock me : We deluded thee,
You all will see if to the land of Huns

The
Nibelungs

You do go down, the green Rhine never more,
And the man only, that thou dost the most
Despise, comes back.

Volker
But surely not the chaplain?

Hagen
Thou seest it. To be sure, I mockingly
Called out: That means the foreign country will
So please us, that it will make us forget
Our home, and laughed and asked after the ship.
Yet as a stroke it hit me, and believe me
It ne'er will end well.

[Aloud]
One will find it out
That one, if Hagen Tronje once does warn,
May listen to Hagen Tronje!

Gunther
Why does, then,
Hagen Tronje not to himself listen and
Remain behind? We have courage enough
Also without him that gruesome adventure
To undertake, that in a sister's arms
Is sure to find its end, if not a kiss
At last is threat'ning from our brother-in-law.

Hagen
Ho, ho! I'm probably too young to die!
'Tis only for thy sake, and not for mine.

Dankwart (to Hagen)
Where does that blood come from?

Hagen
Where have I blood?

Dankwart
[Dips his finger into it and shows it to him]
Hey, from thy brow it's trickling brightly down—
Dost thou not feel?

Hagen
Then sits my helmet loosely.

Gunther
Speak, what is it?

Hagen

I paid the Danube duty
In silence for thee ; thou wilt be no more
Reminded, the receiver has his share.

[He takes off his helmet]

Yet I knew not myself I paid so well.

Gunther

So hast thou, then, the ferryman——

Hagen

Sure enough !

I see it now, that lies have but short legs :
He greeted me with his thick rudder, and
I thanked with my sharp sword.

Gunther

Gelfrat the giant !

Hagen

Yes ; he, the pride of the Bavarians, now
Drives in the river, cut up as his ship.
But be not anxious, on my back I'll carry
You over, if here for the second time
You seek the ferry.

Gunther

Only go on thus

Then will thy raven's wisdom come to honour——

Hagen

It will do that e'en if you play the fiddle!
This way or that we're in the net of death——

Volker

Truly ! But is that new ? We were so ever.

Hagen

That is a word, my Volker, have all thanks.
'Tis true, we ever were, it is not new ;
But one advantage we have in advance
Before the others all, that have to die :
We know our enemy and see the snare——

Gunther

[Interrupts him sharply and abruptly]

Away ! away ! else the Bavarian duke
Will make us pay for the dead exciseman,
And then King Etzel might lose all his fun !

[Out with his own, Hagen and Volker excepted]

The
Nibelungs

Hagen

And by those that are nameless be it sworn:
Who'll push me down, I will tear after me!

Volker

I help with it! But I must say to thee,
Until this hour I have like the others
Thought.

Hagen

So have I. Myself I knew it only,
For so is man, and fie on him and me,
Since I have heard the women prophesy.

Volker

And now I'd like to doubt yet—

Hagen

No, my Volker,
That would be wrong, for now the proof is made!

Volker

But yet all that is true what Ute said:
She is a woman, and t'avenge her husband
'Tis her own brothers she would have to kill,
And with them her old mother!

Hagen

How is that?

Volker

The kings are cov'ring thee, and Ute covers
Again the kings, and does one hit her then
Not also if one hits her sons?

Hagen

That's certain.

Volker

And would a woman e'er send off an arrow
That ere it only can but scratch thy skin,
Through all these hearts must free itself a passage?

Hagen

Come all that has to come, I am quite ready.

Volker

I saw all of us bleeding, in a dream;
But everyone did have his wounds behind,
As does the murd'rer give them, not the knight;
Therefore, fear nothing, friend, but traps for mice.

[Both out]

SCENE II

The
Nibelungs

[Bechlarn. Reception Hall. Goetelinde from one side with Gudrun, Ruediger from the other with Dietrich and Hildebrant. Behind them Iring and Thuring]

Goetelinde

I am glad, noble Dieterich of Bern,
To see you in Bechlarn, and no less gladly
Do I see you, Sir Hildebrant. I have
Only one tongue, and I cannot with it
Two valiant champions greet at the same time.
But I have here two hands that quite alike
Do willingly obey the heart that beats
In equal strength towards you, and I thus
Better my fault.

[She puts out both hands]

Dietrich

[During the greeting]

These words are far too mild
For such old bones!

Hildebrant

That's what I cannot find.
Therefore I do kiss her once more, as she
Does anyway stand doubly before me.

[He kisses Gudrun]

Dietrich

The resemblance really is so pronounced
That the confusion may be well excused.

[He also kisses Gudrun]

Ruediger

Only go on!

Dietrich

I and my master-of-arms,
We play to-day: Who is the greatest fool?
When our heads were brown we used to fight,
With white ones we do kiss!

Goetelinde (to Iring and Thuring)

You noble sirs
Of Denmark and of Thuring, I've already
So often seen, that I may well treat you
As friends.

The
Niebelungs

Iring

[During the greeting]

Without that also is precedence
Due to Sir Dieterich. Where he appears
Each one stands gladly back.

Dietrich

If we do so
Find ourselves together, we, the Amelungs,
And you, that from the farthest North do spring,
Each one of us notched more than a hundred times
In bloody battles, as an oak tree is,
That has the hunter marked for the axe,
Yet ne'er cut down as that one—I would nearly
Believe that we, without our knowing it,
Have plucked the herb that does from death protect.

Iring

A wonder 'tis.

Thuering

The wonder is not great.
On our own thrones we sat formerly,
Now we are here, but for the king of Huns
To greet the bloody Niebelungs, and wear
Our diadem but as a mockery.
Sir Etzel has himself formed his proud court
Of kings, and should think of a name that's new,
That makes one think at once of thirty crowns.
But we would have done well to change the sceptre
Against a beggar's staff, because the stick,
That paltry nondescript, dishonours us.

Dietrich

I, too, am one of you, and came myself.

Thuering

'Tis true, but none knows why, and Etzel himself
Does wonder at it, believe me, as we do.
If thou wert of my kind, I would believe
Thou hadst appeared only to play the lion
And swallow him thyself, when he has got
The wolf and bear inside his stomach. But
This to thy nature's strange, I know it well.
And as thou dost from thy free will entirely
What we from policy and half by force,
So must thou have marvellous reasons truly
That our heads are but too dull to grasp.

Dietrich

I have my reasons, and the day is near
When you will get to know them.

Iring

I am burning
To know them; for that thou should'st bend thyself
There where thou should'st command, it is so strange
That it, 'tis freely said, borders on shame,
Especially this way.

Thuring

I mean that also.

Ruediger

Forget not Etzel's mind and noble way.
I'd serve him willingly, e'en if I was
As free as Dietrich, for he's equal to us
In nobleness; but for us it was easy,
We did inherit it with our blood
From our mothers, but he had to take
It out of his own breast.

Thuring

I feel not so ;
I do obey because I must. But were I
As he is there——

Iring

I do console myself
With our gods, for the same storm that robbed us
Of our crowns did also throw them down,
And if it sometimes also angers me,
This circlet——

[He touches his diadem]

——gleams no longer as it did,
Then quickly into Wodan's glade of oaks
I step, and think of him who's lost yet more !

Dietrich

Then dost thou right !—The great wheel of the world
Will be hung differently, haply exchanged,
And no one knows what's coming.

Ruediger

How is that?

Dietrich

I sat a night once by the nixie's fountain,
And knew myself not where I was. There have I
Listened to much.

The
Nibelungs

Ruediger

What then ?

Dietrich

Who is't can tell ?

Thou hear'st a word thou canst not understand,
Thou seest a picture thou canst not explain
Only when something happens, thou rememb'rest
That long ago the Norna has to thee
Been showing it in floating shadow dances !

[Trumpets]

Iring

The heroes come !

Thuering

The murd'ers !

Ruediger

Say not that.

Dietrich

So did a riddle in my ear remain,
That said : The giant shall not fear the giant
Ever, only the dwarf ! Would'st thou have guessed it ?
Since Siegfried's death I grasped it all too well.

Goetelinde

[At the window ; the trumpets are quite near]
Here they are !

Gudrun

Mother, which am I to kiss ?

Goetelinde

The kings, also the Tronjer.

Ruediger (to the *knights*)

Come then, come !

Dietrich

You go to greet them, and to warn them I.

Ruediger

How so ?

Dietrich

Yes, if they listen to my hints,
So will they drink with thee and then turn back.

[While going out]

Fire and sulphur keep apart, my friend,
Thou canst not put it out, when once it burns !

[All out]

SCENE III

The
Nibelungs

Goetelinde

Come here to me, Gudrun, why dost thou tarry?
We must not show ourselves indifferent
Towards such noble guests.

Gudrun

[Goes also to the window]

Look at him, mother,
The pale one with the hollow eyes of death;
'Tis surely he who did it.

Goetelinde

Who did what?

Gudrun

Our poor queen! She was not at all cheerful
There at the wedding.

Goetelinde

What dost thou of it
Then understand? For thou didst go to sleep
Before she could become so.

Gudrun

Go to sleep!
Not e'en in Vienna did I go to sleep,
As young as I was then.—That's how she sat,
Her head supported, as if she of all
Did think except of us, and if Sir Etzel
Touched her, she shrank, as I should shrink myself
If all too near to us a snake should come.

Goetelinde

Fie, fie, Gudrun!

Gudrun

Thou canst believe me truly,
You only failed to notice. Thou dost else
Praise mine eyes.

Goetelinde

When there's needles to pick up.

Gudrun

And father calls me his house calendar.

Goetelinde

It shall be done no more, thou art too pert.

The
Nibelungs

Gudrun

Then was she merry?

Goetelinde

As beseems the widow.

No more of this!

[She steps back from the window]

Gudrun

It but passed through my mind

When I——

[Screams]

He's here!——

SCENE IV

[Ruediger enters with guests and the Nibelungs. Giselher follows later and stands apart]

Hagen

We are fright'ning here, it seems.

[General welcoming]

Hagen (to Gudrun)

Haply one has maligned me, and has spread
I know not how to kiss? But here's the proof!

[He kisses her]

(then to *Goetelinde*)

Pardon me, noble lady! I was anxious
For my renown, and quickly had to show
That I'm no dragon. But e'en if I were,
Then from this rosy mouth a kiss had quite
As certainly changed me into a shepherd
As e'er it happened in a fairy tale.
What shall I do? Seek violets? Catch lambs?
I will bet for a second kiss with thee,
The flowers shall not lose one single leaf
And not one hair the lambs. Speak, dost agree?

Ruediger

To the repast now! It's laid out of doors.

Hagen

Wilt thou not let us see thy weapons first?

[Steps before a shield]

That is a shield ! I'd like to know the master
That forged it. But thou hast certainly
Not got it at first hand.

Ruediger

Would'st like to try
If thou canst guess who before me possessed it ?

Hagen

[Takes the shield from the wall]

Hey, that is weighty. But few go about
Who'd not have such an heirloom to disdain.

Goetelinde

Dost hear, Gudrun ?

Hagen

Thou well canst let it lie
Just like a millstone, if it pleases thee ;
It does protect itself.

Goetelinde

Thanks for this word.

Hagen

How, noble lady ?

Goetelinde

Have thanks, a thousand thanks !
It was my father, Nudung, that did wear it.

Volker

Then he was right, when he did make you swear
You'd ne'er another champion wed ; but him
Who could his weapons use, one easily
Can picture with the shield the sword also.

Hagen

I ne'er heard that ! How such a fiddler does
Know many things !

Ruediger

It is so, as he says.

Hagen

[Wants to hang up the shield again]

Well, I deplore his death with all my heart.
I would—— forgive——, that I'd slain him myself,
It must have been a daring champion, truly.

Goetelinde

Let it but stand.

Hagen

No servant does that for me.

Ruediger

'Tis well. We know at least now what does please thee.

Hagen

Dost mean it? Truly, it would suit the Balmung
That was left to me by the valiant Siegfried,
And that I collect arms, I ne'er deny.

Ruediger

Only thou takest none ever at first hand.

Hagen

I like those that are proven, that is true.

[All out]

SCENE V

Volker

[Holds back Giselher]

My Giselher, I must confide in thee!

Giselher

In me?

Volker

I also ask for thy advice.

Giselher

Nearly the whole time we did ride together,
And of a sudden now? Well, then, be short.

Volker

Didst see the maiden? But why ask I yet,
She did not hold a goblet in her hand.

Giselher

Speak not so stupidly, I saw her well.

Volker

But after all thou didst disdain the kiss
Which she did owe thee——

Giselher

Why dost thou mock me?

Volker

I have to prove thee ere I can believe it,
For that about the goblet's thine own word.
How old seems she to thee!

Giselher

Now let me go.

Volker

Thou hast yet time. Can she without dispute
Be called a maiden already?

Giselher

Does that concern thee?

Volker

It does. I want to woo, and I must know
That she will not her bridegroom suddenly leave
When she is called to join in blindman's-buff.

Giselher

Thou want'st to woo her? Thou?

Volker

Not for myself!

My helmet is, in spite of all its bosses,
Yet bright enough to show my face to me.
Oh, no, for Gerenot.

Giselher

For Gerenot?

Volker

I ask in earnest, will it please you all?
I'll gladly do it then. I saw myself
That it went through him, as if struck by lightning,
When he did see this child stand at the window.

Giselher

He? But he did not even look up there;
'Twas I that did so.

Volker

Was it really thou?

Spokest thou also to me?

Giselher

That I did not,
But therefore I speak now. You always have
Urged me that I should woo, and Gerenot
Did most of all—well, now it shall be done.

All at once ?

Volker

Giselher

If she will. I have disdained
But the kiss of politeness—

Volker

Is't really so?

Giselher

I missed it, an' it please thee, as my part
Of the great cake ; but it's all one to me,
Another one or none.

[Quickly out]

SCENE VI

Volker

Well, that does come
Like fever ! But it comes at the right time,
Therefore I blew at it with fullest cheeks ;
For if to Ruediger we are related
Then Etzel's best vassal is our friend.

SCENE VII

[Garden. Ruediger with his guests. Banquet in the
background]

Hagen

Hast thou in secret promised nought to her ?

Ruediger

If I had done it, I'd have to conceal it.

Hagen

I think so yet. The change was all too quick !
At first the wooing did offend her deeply,
Then suddenly she agreed.

Ruediger

And if it were :
Can she demand e'er what one must refuse ?

Hagen

Who knows ? Yet it's all one to me.

Ruediger

I know that.

The
Nibelungs

A woman may, that deeply is offended,
Think but of vengeance, and in bloody plans
Surpass us all ; but when the day does come
When then an arm does wish to rise for her,
She will with trembling hold it back herself,
And cry : Not yet !

Hagen

May be !—Where hast been, Volker ?

SCENE VIII

[Volker comes]

Volker

I've been sick nursing—your air seems to be
Not very healthy. Fevers break out here
That over twenty years slept quietly,
And that so fiercely as I never saw.

Ruediger

Where is thy patient, then ?

Volker

There he just comes.

SCENE IX

[Giselher comes]

Ruediger

To dinner now ! There we shall guess this riddle
At the same time as we crack nuts and almonds.

Giselher

My noble Margrave, first permit a word.

Ruediger

As many as permits my kitchen-master—
No more, nor less.

Giselher

I beg of you to grant me
Your daughter's hand.

The
Nibelungs

Gererot

Hey, Giselher !

Giselher

Dost thou

Not like it? Speak also ! And let us swear :
Howe'er the lot does fall we bear no malice.
Thou laugh'st? Haply thou spok'st and hast thy "yes"?
'Tis well, I also then keep what I vowed,
But ne'er will take a wife !

Gererot

What dost imagine ?

Ruediger

[Makes a sign to his wife and daughter]

Come here, Gudrun !

Hagen

[Strikes Giselher on the shoulder]

Thou art a valiant smith !

'Twill be a ring !—I'll also speak for thee.

Gunther

That I do too. I shall be highly pleased
When I the crown on this pure virgin brow
May set.

Giselher (to *Gudrun*)

And thou ?

Goetelinde

[As *Gudrun* is silent]

Alas! so you have not

Heard long ago the rumour that my child
Is deaf and dumb?

Ruediger

I willingly return

Your word to you.

Giselher

I have not asked for it,
She would be anyway too good for me.

Hagen

Right, go on hammering. For such a ring
Fits quite in our chain.

(to *Volker*)

If she dares that,
Then she is ten times bloodier than I am!

Giselher

Gudrun—Ah, I forgot! Do teach me quickly
The signs that you do use to speak with her,
And this time ask for me.

Gudrun

Do not believe it.

I only was ashamed.

Volker

Thou darling child!
On thy lips surely an enchantment dwells,
Who does for something wish with the first kiss
He has it.

Giselher

Speak.

Gudrun

My father's spoke not yet.

Hagen (to Ruediger)

There's thy authority! Seal! For thy cook
Becomes impatient.

Ruediger (to Gunther)

Am I wanted yet?
Must I the part play of that fool to whom
A crown fell on his brow, and who 'gainst Heaven
Did cry: I do accept it? Well, so be it!
And so I say my "yes!" Now thou—

(to *Hagen*)

—dost know

How deeply I forswore myself 'gainst you.

Hagen

Now take each other's hands! Well done! The ring
Is finished, smith, now not another stroke!
You'll wed when we return!

Giselher

Why so?

Goetelinde

Of course!

Ruediger

I waited seven years.

Hagen

But thou must not
Be then refused, if also it should happen
A pair or so were missing of thy limbs.

The
Nibelungs

(to *Gudrun*)

I vouch for it he comes not without head.

Ruediger

We agree to that. It is but for a feast.

Dietrich

[Suddenly steps near]

Who knows! Queen Kriemhild cries yet day and night.

Hagen

Etzel endures it? Well! There rings the cook.

Dietrich

I have only come here to tell you this :

It's done; now do esteem it as you like.

[Goes with Ruediger to the banquet]

SCENE X

Hagen

You heard! That spake Sir Dieterich of Bern.

Dietrich

[Turns back again]

Be on your guard, you haughty Nibelungs,
And do not think, each one, that now his tongue
Does use for you, may also use his arm!

[Follows Ruediger]

SCENE XI

Volker

That spake a king, that surely is the last
On earth to have suspicion.

Hagen

They know him.

Volker

And Nixie's wise, that from the magic fountain
Did rise——

Hagen

Art thou now prattling?

Gunther

Well, what is it?

Hagen
They said good coats of mail were necessary——

Volker
And yet would be no use.

Gunther
What matters it?
The help is near at hand.

Hagen
How so?

Gunther
Go back!

Hagen
Back?

Gunther
Certainly! Announce it to my mother
What happened here, that she should stuff her beds,
And do rejoice that thou hast saved us all.
Because the danger thou eternally
Art warning us from, is only for thee
And not for us existing. We are covered
As soon as thou thyself dost wish; and now
Thou hast got thy commission. So return!

Hagen
Dost thou command it?

Gunther
Did I want to do that,
I should have done it on the Rhine, at Worms.

Hagen
The service then I must refuse to thee.

Gunther
Dost see? It is not only for my sake!
Thou dost not want to miss where one might rail:
Where is he, then? He surely does not fear?
Well, what drives thee, that drives me too. I will
Not wait until the king of Huns sends me
A spinning wheel. Yes, if the Norn' itself
Was threat'ning me with finger lifted up,
Backwards I would not move one step! And thou
Art our death, if down there it's so written
As thou dost prophesy. But——

[He strikes Hagen on the shoulder]

Come now death!

[They follow the others]

ACT III

[Hunland. King Etzel's Castle. Reception Hall]

SCENE I

[Kriemhild, Werbel, Swemmel]

Kriemhild

He ventures uninvited?—Hagen Tronje,
I knew thee well!

Werbel

He is in front, and leads.

Kriemhild

Seize then at once their weapons when they come—
You know, with cunning.

Werbel

We are concerned ourselves.

Kriemhild

But have you courage yet, now that you know them?

Werbel

A hornet's swarm has o'ercome many a lion!—
Knows Etzel anything?

Kriemhild

No!—and after all,—Yes!

Werbel

'Tis only——

Kriemhild

What?

Werbel

We even in the desert

Honour a guest.

The
Nibelungs

Kriemhild

Is guest, whom none invited ?

Werbel

With us, the en'my even.

Kriemhild

Perhaps it's all
Not necessary. Here King Gunther's free,
And if in Burgundy the hangman's found,
I shall not want the Hun avengers then.

Werbel

Yet queen——

Kriemhild

I will keep even then to you,
What I did promise you. The Nieb'lungs' treasure
Is yours, when he does fall. I do not ask,
Through whom he fell.

Werbel

Also if we did nothing ?
In spite of Etzel's anger I'm for that
Thine unto death !

Kriemhild

Saw you Burgundy's queen ?

Werbel

Her, no one sees.

Kriemhild

Also not heard about her ?

Werbel

The queerest speeches are going about.

Kriemhild

What speeches, then ?

Werbel

Well, it is whispered,
That she is living in a grave.

Kriemhild

And yet

Not dead ?

Werbel

She moved in after thee at once,
Off in the night, discovered after weeks,
And no one can get her away.

Kriemhild She—Brunhild—
In Siegfried's holy resting-place ?

Werbel 'Tis so.

Kriemhild
Vampire !

Werbel
Crouching by the coffin.

Kriemhild Dev'lish
Arts in her mind.

Werbel
May be. But in her eyes
Are tears. And with her nails now her face tearing,
And then the wood.

Kriemhild
There you can see yourselves.

Werbel
The king gave orders she should be walled in,
But quickly did her old nurse set herself
In the door.

Kriemhild
I swear I'll drive thee out again !—

[After a long pause]

This lock of hair my mother sent to me
And did not add to it one single word ?

Werbel
'Tis so.

Kriemhild
It shall remind me, do I think,
That I do not my brothers keep too long.

Werbel
That well may be.

Kriemhild
It is as white as snow.

Werbel
But she would surely not have thought of it
Had she not been so worried by her dream,
For she herself was furthering the journey.

The
Nibelungs

Kriemhild
What dream was it?

Werbel
She saw the night before
We were to leave, all birds fall dead from heaven.

Kriemhild
Oh, what an omen !

Werbel
It is so, indeed.
The children with their feet were scraping them
Together, as in autumn the dry leaves——

Kriemhild
Her dreams have never failed yet to come true !——
That is a token !

Werbel
Thou rejoicest ? She
Was frightened, and while we our horses mounted,
She cut off from her aged head a lock,
And gave it me, just like a letter for thee.

Kriemhild
Get ready now !

Werbel
The net's already spread.
[Werbel and Swemmel out]

SCENE II

Kriemhild
[Raising the lock]
I can well understand thee ! But fear nought !
I'm but after the vulture, and thy falcons
Are safe up to their very smallest feather,
Except it were,—but no ; they hate each other !

SCENE III

Etzel
[Enters with retinue]
Now surely thou art satisfied with me?
And if thou art not yet, thou wilt become so



1903
G. H. McCall.

Act III.

KRIEMHILD: KNOWEST THOU THIS GIRDLER?

Sc. VI.

Before I leave thee. Tell me only now
How I am to receive thy family.

The
Nibelungs

Kriemhild

My king—

Etzel

Do not stop short! Settle it thyself
As it does please thee. I went to the gate
Where I the aged Dieterich of Bern
At first received, and wore a diadem.
That was my highest up to now; to-day
I'm ready to do more, that they shall see,
The Hun knows how to appreciate thee also.
Unto the furthest marches of my realm
Have I sent in advance before, the kings
That more by choice obey me, than by force,
And bonfires that from mountain to mountain
Are being lit, are flaming to apprise them
That they are welcome at King Etzel's court,
And us that we should know the road they come.
Shall I now hold a rehearsal of my crowns,
And have my purple aired once again?
Say only so, and do not trouble about it,
That I'm not weighed down by a load of iron
As much as by an ounce of gold. I'll choose
The lightest, and if thou dost want to thank me,
Then canst thou with a scarlet riband mark
It for me towards the joyous feast of Solstice,
That at that time I can find it at once.

Kriemhild

My husband and my king, that were too much.

Etzel

Too much perhaps for them, but not for thee!
For thou hast accomplished the utmost wish
That yet to me on earth remained, by giving
An heir to me for my realm, and what I
Have promised thee in my first father's joy
That will I keep also. Thou canst not ask
What I'd refuse, since to me lives a son,
And if thou dost not care t'ask for thyself,
So let me prove it to thy family
That what I speak I mean most seriously.

Kriemhild

So grant me that, according to propriety,
And to deserts I should receive and treat them.
I know it best what does suit everyone,

The
Nibelungs

And be thou sure that each one shall get what
Is due to him, how strangely I might too
Prepare the feast and set the chairs for all.

Etzel

So be it! I invited at thy wish,
For cousins who disdain me seven years
I can miss in the eighth, as they do me,
Therefore, as it does please thee, order all.
If thou dost want to squander half my realm
Thou'rt free to do so, for thou art the queen,
And if thou dost prefer to save thy cakes,
I am content, thou art the mistress here.

Kriemhild

My lord and king, nobly thou ever hast
Been treating me, but noblest in this hour.
Be thanked for it.

Etzel

I'll ask thee but one thing :
Let me now recommend unto thy grace
The aged Dieterich of Bern. If thou
Dost honour him, thou dost what pleases me.

Kriemhild

It shall be done, and that with all my heart.

Etzel

The lords of Thuring and of Denmark too
I'm sending down to greet my guests for me,
But Dieterich went of his own free will.

Kriemhild

He surely knows them !

Etzel

No, he knows them not.

Kriemhild

Perhaps respects or fears them !

Etzel

Neither! No!

Kriemhild

Then it is much !

Etzel

Far more yet than thou think'st.
For see : There are three free ones in the world,
Three strong ones, Nature could not, it is said,

Create, without all human beings first
And animals to weaken, and one step
To lower them——

The
Nibelungs

Kriemhild

Three ?

Etzel

The first is—forgive !
He was ! The second one I am myself,
The third and mightiest of all is he !

Kriemhild

Dietrich of Bern !

Etzel

He likes to keep it secret,
And only moves just as the earth does move,
When he must needs ; but I myself I saw it.
Thou know'st the Huns, courageous as they are,
I must concede to them the arrogance
That fills them from their crown unto their toe !
Who knows the trade, knows also that the soldier
Does in the field only therefore obey
So implicitly, for he may sometimes
Defy one in the stable, and he allows
Him willingly the small right so to wear
The feather and the clasp as he does choose,
For he pays dearly for it with his blood.
Therefore I neither can the noble kings
Protect so from every impertinence
As I should like, for even my last man
Will have his part of Etzel's power and fame
That he considers as a general good,
And shows it, for he whistles when all pray,
And smacks if he sees them politely greet.
Thus one did dare behind Dieterich's back
Also a rude word, and that on the day
He did come here. He looked round silently,
Then walked towards an oak, uprooted it,
And laid it then across the scoffer's back,
Who did break down at once beneath its weight,
And everyone cried : " Long life to the Berner ! "

Kriemhild

I ne'er thought that.

Etzel

He so forswears his praise
As others do their shame, and he would like
To give the deeds away, just as the booty,
If he'd only find takers. But 'tis so.

The
Niebelungs

Kriemhild

And yet?—Above all other human beings,
And thy vassal?

Etzel

I was frightened myself,
When he with crown laid down before me stepped,
And his sword lowered. What did drive him then
I do not know, but he more faithfully
Does serve me than do many that I vanquished.
And nigh on seven years! I gladly would
Endow him with my richest fiefs, but he
Took nothing but a farm, and from this also
He gives away all but an Easter egg
That he does eat.

Kriemhild

How strange!

Etzel

And canst thou neither
Divine him? He's a Christian, as thou art,
And strange and obscure are your usages
To us. I know that some creep into caverns
And starve there, if no eagles bring them food.
Some scale, in the hot desert, steepest rocks
And nest on them, until the whirlwind
Does throw them down.

Kriemhild

They're saints and penitents,
But Dietrich wears a sword.

Etzel

It's all the same!—
I'd like at last to thank him, and I lack
The gift he'd take. Then thou do it for me!
Thou yet art owing to us thy first smile:
Give it him!

Kriemhild

Thou shalt be content with me!

SCENE IV

[Werbel and Swemmel come]

Werbel

It flames already from the nearest mountain,
The Niebelungs are near!

Etzel

[Wants to descend]

Kriemhild

[Holds him back]

I shall go down,
And lead them to the hall. But thou remain'st
And dost await them ; may the stairs become
Longer to them, than did th'entire way
From the Rhine unto the castle of the Huns.

Etzel

So be it! They also had time. I will
Meanwhile behold the heroes from the window:
Come, Swemmel, show me every one of them.

[Exit. Swemmel follows]

SCENE V

Kriemhild

Now I've authority. It's full enough!
He has no need to help me, I'll achieve
It all alone, if he's not hind'ring me,
And that he will not hinder, I know now.

[Exit]

SCENE VI

[Castle-yard. The Nibelungs with Dietrich, Ruediger,
Iring, Thuering appear]

Hagen

Arrived at last! It does look sumptuous here!
What hall is this?

Ruediger

It is the one for you,
Thou'lt get to know it ere the evening falls;
There's room in it for more than a thousand guests.

Hagen

We also thought we sat in no bear's cavern,
Because we do not suffer more from smoke
As did our fathers in the olden time,
But this is something diff'rent quite.

(to the *kings*)

Take care

Not to invite th'Asiatic brother-in-law :
He sends his horse into your state apartment
And asks you then where shelter is for him.

Ruediger

Sir Etzel says : The people to themselves
Picture the king just like the house he lives in !
Therefore he spends on that one all the splendour,
That for his body he does proudly scorn.

Hagen

Then they imagine him with as many eyes
As here are windows sparkling towards them,
And tremble from afar. But he is right.

Ruediger

There comes the queen !

SCENE VII

[Kriemhild enters with a great train]

Hagen

And yet always in black !

Kriemhild (to the *Nibelungs*)

Is it you really ? And are these my brothers ?
We nearly thought an enemy was coming,
So large is your retinue. But be greeted !

[Welcoming, but without kissing or embracing]

My Giselher, to the lords of Burgundy
The queen of all the Huns presents a greeting,
But thee the sister kisses on thy mouth.
Sir Dieterich, the king enjoined on me
To give you thanks that you have been receiving
His guests. I do render these thanks to you.

[Gives him her hand]

Hagen

One greets the masters differently from the men ;
That is a sign of very strangest sort,
That many silly dream brings into honour.

[Ties his helmet firmer]

Kriemhild

Art thou here too? Who has invited thee?

Hagen

Who did my lords invite, invited me!
And to whom I'm not welcome, he should neither
Have summoned the Burgundians, for I do
Belong as much to them as does their sword!

Kriemhild

May thou be greeted by who likes to see thee:
What art thou bringing me to expect it from me?
I have not vouchsafed the farewell to thee,
How canst thou hope now for a friendly welcome?

Hagen

What could I haply bring thee, but myself?
I ne'er yet carried water to the sea,
And should now for thee heap up treasures new?
Thou'rt long ago the richest in the world.

Kriemhild

I also will have nought but what is mine—
Where is't? Where has remained the Nieb'lungs' treasure?
An army comes with you! 'Twas surely needed
To convey it hither. Deliver it up to me!

Hagen

What dost thou think? The treasure is well kept,
We choose the very safest place for it,
The only one that thieves can never reach—
It's lying in the Rhine where it is deepest.

Kriemhild

So you have not e'en made amends for that
Which yet to-day is in your power to do?
Thyself thou say'st, wast needful for the journey
And not the treasure! Is that the new faith?

Hagen

We were invited for the feast of Solstice,
But not to the Last Judgment, and if we
Are now supposed to dance with death and devil
They did not tell us that at the right time.

Kriemhild

'Tis not for myself I ask for these treasures,
For I have quite sufficient with my thimble;
But queens are not respected very well,
When never comes their nuptial dower at all.

Hagen

We carried far too heavily in our iron
To load ourselves with thy red gold besides.
Who weighs my shield and coat of mail, does blow
The sand-corn off, but adds no more to it.

Kriemhild

I am yet owing here the bridal gifts,
But that is Etzel's business, not mine,
So lay aside your arms and follow me,
He long ago awaits you with impatience.

Hagen

No, Queen, the armour I do take with me,
Chamberlain's services suit thee but ill!

(to *Werbel*)

[Who on a sign from Kriemhild seizes Hagen's shield]
Also thou'rt too polite, sweet messenger,
The claws are ne'er a burden to the eagle.

Kriemhild

You want to come before the king in arms?
Then has also a traitor warned you,
And did I know him, he himself should suffer
With what he threatened you deceitfully.

Dietrich

[Steps opposite to her]

I am the man—I, Dietrich, Vogt of Bern!

Kriemhild

I'd not believe that from one but yourself!
The world calls you the noble Dieterich,
And looks at you as if you were but here
That you should set a dam to fire and water,
And show the right way to the sun and moon,
If once they should be straying from their path.
Are these the virtues for which the human tongue
Does miss a name? for no one before you
Is said to have possessed them, that you do
Newly incite relations 'gainst each other
That want to be reconciled, and your mouth
Demean to be but bellows, that are trying
To make coals that are dead burn up anew.

Dietrich

I know what thou art planning, and have gone
But to prevent it.

Kriemhild

And what may that be?
If thou dost know the wish deep in my soul,
Which thou as man and hero canst condemn,
Name it to me, and scold me as thou likest.
But if thou must be silent, for not daring
T'accuse me of a wrong, then do demand
These here should give their weapons up to you.

Hagen

He only needs to do that, and he has them.

Dietrich

I vouch to thee for them.

Kriemhild

For Etzel also,
That he should not avenge this twofold shame?
The nixie's adorning herself with my pearls,
The clumsy fish is playing with my gold,
And instead of as sign of peace now here
To bind their arm, their sword gleams as a greeting.

Hagen

Sir Etzel ne'er was yet in Burgundy,
And if only thyself dost not betray it,
Then much he knows what's custom among us.

Kriemhild

Each one does choose his token as he likes,
You enter under that one of the blood,
Yet note! Whoe'er boasts of his own protection
He is quit of the strange one, and so good.

Hagen

We ever count on ourselves alone,
And think all else of very little value.

Dietrich

I shall myself superintend the salt,
That no quarrel ensue.

Kriemhild

Thou know'st them not
And wilt yet much regret.

Hagen (to Ruediger)

Sir Margrave, come,
And introduce yourself as blood relation.
Then she will see at once, we are intent
On peaceful business, for marriage makers

The
Niebelungs

Seek no dispute. Yes, though we go in iron,
Queen, we were doing love's own work, and beg thee
The new-formed tie to strengthen with thy blessing
That does unite with Giselher, Gudrun.

Kriemhild

Is't so, Sir Ruediger, and can it be so?

Giselher

Yes, sister, yes!

Kriemhild

You're married?

Giselher

We're engaged.

Hagen

The wedding only, when thou hast been blessing!

(to *Gunther*)

But now, it seems to me, it's time at last
To go to court. Why should we any longer
Let ourselves be stared at?

Dietrich

I will lead you!

[Out with the Niebelungs]

Kriemhild

[In going out to Ruediger]

Sir Ruediger, do you your vow remember?
The hour's nigh, when you have to redeem it.

[Both out. There are more and more Huns appearing]

SCENE VIII

Rumolt

How seems this to you?

Dankwart

We will keep our people
Together and await the rest.

Rumolt

'Tis strange
King Etzel never came to meet us. Else
He is supposed to be of courteous manners.

Dankwart

And how they stare and secretly do push
Each other's arm, and whisper!

[To some Huns that come too near]

Is ta'en already. Also this, and this!
Already twenty paces from here does
Begin my big toe; who does dare to tread
Upon it?

Rumolt

[Calls to the back]

And I want just as much room
For my humpback; it's tender like an egg.

Dankwart

That helps!—It's true they grunt, but they retire;
Unearthly rabble are they, small and saucy.

Rumolt

I did peer once into a gloomy tavern
Through a crack in the rocks. There glowed towards me,
Perhaps on thirty eyewheels, green and blue
And fiery yellow, out of every corner
And nook, where crouching were the animals—
The cats and snakes, who, blinking in their circles,
Did turn. It looked horrible, and it seemed
To me as if a starry hell deep down
In the middle of the earth had opened,
As all these sparks confusedly did dance.
And I then started back, for I knew not
Whate'er it was. That came into my mind
Now I those people saw glower and stare,
And the darker is the night the better it fits.

Dankwart

There'll be no lack of cats and snakes. I wonder
If lions are amongst them?

Rumolt

Proof will teach it.
There were none in my cavern. I did seek
The entrance then as soon as I remembered,
For it was light outside, and shot into it.
Many an arrow hit, as did the groans
Announce to me; but I heard ne'er a roaring
Nor growling, for it was the brood of night
That sat together there, the cowardly crew
That sting and scratch instead of jumping out

The
Nibelungs

To open fight with paw, and claw and horn,
And just the same these do appear to me.
Take heed if they cannot creep upon us,
Then there's no danger yet.

Dankwart

I should not like
To despise them, for Etzel has the world
Conquered with them.

Rumolt

Did he try it with us?
He cut but grass, and let his arms fall down
When he at last came upon German oaks.

SCENE IX

[Werbel has already before been visible with Swemmel among
the Huns, followed unnoticed by them by Eckewart]

Werbel

Friends, crave you not for your night quarters now?

Dankwart

They have not yet been shown to us.

Werbel

Quite ready. All is

[To his followers]

Come! Mix yourselves as it suits.

Dankwart

Stop! We Burgundians like to stay alone.

Werbel

[Encourages his people to come]

Oh, never mind!

Dankwart

Once more! That's our custom.

Werbel

In war. But not at festive meal.

Dankwart

Else they shall draw! Stand back!

Werbel
Whoever saw such guests!

Rumolt
Their hosts they do resemble to a hair!
[Someone applauds]

Dankwart
Someone applauds. Who is't?

Rumolt
Dost thou not guess?

Dankwart
An invisible friend.

Rumolt
I saw before
The aged Eckewart creep quietly past,
Who did escort the lady Kriemhild down.

Dankwart
Think'st thou that it was he?

Rumolt
I think it was.

Dankwart
That one has sworn faith to her unto death,
And ever ready was to do her service;
That were a sign for us.

SCENE X

[Hagen and Volker come back]

Hagen
How stands all here?

Dankwart
We keep ourselves as thou hast ordered us.

Rumolt
And Kriemhild's chamberlain approves of it.

Hagen
Well, Etzel is a man after my mind.

Dankwart
Is he?

The
Nibelungs

Rumolt
Not false?

Hagen
Not he ! He wears the coat
Of the best champion, that his arm has slain,
And in it goes on acting the dead man's part.
The dress is somewhat narrow for his shoulders,
Also the seams split oftener than he knows ;
But he means well.

Dankwart
Why was there no reception ?

Volker
He seemed to me as if he was tied up,
And only therefore had not greeted us.

Hagen
That's how it was. His wife had hindered
His coming down to us, but he compensated
For't richly by his kindness.

Rumolt
I did think
Of my own dog, when he, so overfriendly,
Gave us his hand. It's always wagging doubly,
When it is hindered by its cord from jumping,
And meeting me at the door.

Hagen
I did not think
Then of thy dog, I thought but of the lion
That tears the iron chain, and, as they say,
Does spare a woman's hair.

(to *Dankwart* and *Rumolt*)
Now eat and drink,
We have got that behind us and take over
The watch for you !

Dankwart (to *Werbel* and *Swemmel*)
So lead us an' it please you.

Werbel (to *Swemmel*)
Thou do it !

[Secretly]
I must to the queen at once !
[All disperse. *Werbel* into the palace. *Eckewart* again
becomes visible]

SCENE XI

The
Nibelungs

Volker

What think'st thou ?

Hagen

It will ne'er with Etzel's will
Happen, that they their faith break towards us,
Because he is proud of his honesty.
He is pleased to be able at last to swear
And does feed now his conscience all the better
That he did let it starve so many years.
But for all that the ground's not safe, it groans
Where'er one may tread, and this fiddler is
The mole that secretly does undermine it.

Volker

Oh, he is false as the first ice ! Also
We will think everywhere of the tame wolf
Which suddenly, while licking, bites again.
What's not bred in the blood does not hold good.
But see : who's creeping past there with white hair
So very strangely ?

[Eckewart walks slowly past, as one who in thoughts is
talking to himself. His movements are in unison
with Volker's description]

Hagen

[Calls]

Hey, Eckewart !

Volker

He whispers, murmurs something in the air,
And does behave as if he saw us not.
I'll go and follow, for he counts on it.

Hagen

Fie, Volker ! is it fit for us, to listen ?
Knock 'gainst the shield and rattle with the sword.

[He rattles with his armour]

Volker

Now he makes signs.

Hagen

Well, then let us turn round.

[They do it, very loudly]

Who something has to tell, he tell it there
Where one knows it not yet.

The
Nibelungs

Volker

That is——

Hagen

Be silent,

Dost want to save the King of Huns the shame?
Let him look to it.

[Eckewart shakes his head and disappears]

Volker

That's too queer for me.

Hagen

[Seizes him under the arm]

My friend, we are now on your ship of death.
Of all the two-and-thirty winds, not one
Does serve us more, around the wildest sea,
And above us the scarlet thundercloud.
What carest thou, if the shark does swallow thee,
Or if the lightning strikes thee? It's all one,
And something better can no prophet tell thee!
Therefore, stop up thy ears, as I am doing,
And give way to thy innermost desires—
That's the last right of those condemned to death.

SCENE XII

[The kings enter with Ruediger]

Gunther

You still take the fresh air?

Hagen

I should like once

To hear the lark again.

Giseller

It does awaken

But with the morning dawn.

Hagen

Well, until then

I do intend to chase the owl and bat.

Gunther

You do not want to go to sleep all night?

Hagen

Not if Sir Ruediger does not undress us.

Ruediger

God keep me from it !

Giselher

Then I wake with you.

Hagen

Not so ! We are enough, and we are good
For every drop of blood, except the one
On which the gnat does live.

Geremot

Then thou believest—

Hagen

Nought ! Only I am to be found at once
If one seeks me. Now creep into your bed
As fits carousers.

Gunther

You will call ?

Hagen

Rest easy,
You will be called by no one but the cock.

Gunther

Good night, then !

[Off into the hall with the others]

SCENE XIII

Hagen

[After him]

And remember well thy dream
As did thy mother at our departure !

(to *Volker*)

We shall take care, it will not be fulfilled,
Before thou canst relate it ! He does yet
Not suspect anything.

Volker

Oh, yes ! But he
Is much too proud to own it.

Hagen

Well, he were
Blind also, if he saw not how the faces
Are dark'ning round us, and the best of all
The most.

[Many Huns have returned]

Volker

Look there!

Hagen

Now hast thou got the secret
Of the old one! But I'd been thinking it!—
Come, sit thyself down here! Thy back turned so!—
[They sit down, turning their back on the Huns]
If they begin to trip behind thee—cough,
Then thou wilt hear them running, for they will
As mice be coming, and as rats they'll go!

SCENE XIV

[Kriemhild appears with Werbel on the top of the stairs]

Werbel

Dost thou see! There they sit!

Kriemhild

They do not look
Like going yet to bed!

Werbel

And if I beckon,
My whole troop will be rushing on.

Kriemhild

How large
Is that?

Werbel

About a thousand.

Kriemhild

[Makes towards the Huns an anxious restraining gesture]

Werbel

What means that?

Kriemhild

Go, that they shall not move.

Werbel

Is it that suddenly
Thou'rt sorry for thy own again?

Kriemhild

Thou fool!

The Tronjer claps those all alone together,
Meanwhile the fiddler does his fiddle play.
Thou dost not know the Nibelungs. Away!
[Both disappear]

SCENE XV

Volker

[Jumps up]

It goes no more thus.

[Fiddles a merry melody]

Hagen

[Strikes his fiddle]

Now, that of the death ship!
The last of it, when friend is stabbed by friend,
And then the torch.—That will come off to-morrow.

ACT IV

[The dead of night]

SCENE I

[Volker stands and fiddles. Hagen sits as before.
The Huns in astonished and attentive groups around them.
One hears Volker's playing before the curtain rises.
Directly after, one of the Huns drops his shield]

Hagen

Now stop! Thou'lt kill them, if thou dost yet longer
Thus play and sing. The weapons fall already.
That was a shield. Three strokes more of the bow
The spear will follow. We need nothing further,
But the relation of that which we have
Done long before we came; it does not need
Any new deeds for us to master them.

Volker

[Without listening to him, visionary]

At first 'twas black! It only gleamed by night,
As cats do, when one strokes them in the dark,
And only that, when cleft by tread of hoof.
Then did two children quarrel for a piece,
And in their fury pelted each other with it,
And one did hit the other one to death.

Hagen

[Indifferent]

He now starts something fresh. Go on! go on!

Volker

Now it turned fiery yellow, it did gleam,
And whoe'er saw it, did desire it,
And ne'er desisted.

Hagen

That I never heard!—
Perhaps he dreams. All others I know well!

The
Nibelungs

Volker

Then there is wilder strife and poison'd envy;
They come with every weapon; they do even
Tear away from the plough the peaceful iron
And kill themselves with it.

Hagen

What does he mean?

Volker

The blood does run in streams, and as it stiffens
The gold is dark'ning wherefore it did flow,
And gleams in brighter light.

Hagen

Ho, ho! the gold!

Volker

'Tis red already, and becomes more red
With every murder. Up! why spare yourselves?
Only when not a single one lives more
It gets the proper glow, for the last drop
Is needed as the first.

Hagen

Oh, I believe it.

Volker

Where is it gone?—The earth has swallowed it,
And those that are yet left are scattered,
And seek for magic wands—the silly folks!
The greedy dwarfs have grasped it then and there,
And guard it in the depth. Do leave it there,
Then have you eternal peace!

[Sits down and lays aside the fiddle]

Hagen

Dost thou wake up?

Volker

[Jumps up again wildly]

In vain! In vain! It has again come back!
And to the curse that in itself does lie,
Has yet a new one added itself to it:
Who owns it e'er, dies ere it gladdens him.

Hagen

'Tis about the treasure. Now all is clear to me.

Volker

[Wilder yet]

And if at last through the mutual murder
It should be masterless on earth, then bursts
A fire out of it with unbridled glow,
That all the oceans cannot ever stifle,
Because it is to set th'entire world
On fire, and is to outlast Ragnaroke.

[Sits down]

Hagen

And is that certain?

Volker

Thus in their fury have
The dwarfs decreed it, when they lost the treasure.

Hagen

How did it happen?

Volker

Through rape of the gods.
Odin and Locke had slain by mistake
A child of giants, and they had to ransom
Themselves.

Hagen

But did constraint exist for them?

Volker

They wore the human form, and had therefore
In human body nought but human strength.

SCENE II

[Werbel appears among the Huns, whispering]

Werbel

Well! Are you spiders, that by music are
Enchanted and made lifeless? Up! It's time!

SCENE III

[Kriemhild with retinue descends. Torches]

Hagen

Who approaches there?

The
Nibelungs

Volker

It is the queen herself.
Goes she so late to bed? Come, let's get up!

Hagen

What dost thou think? No, no; we remain sitting.

Volker

That would bring us but little honour, for
She is a noble woman, and a queen.

Hagen

She would imagine that it is from fear
We're rising. Balmung, be not so shamefaced!

[Lays the Balmung across his knees]

Thine eye does threat'ningly gleam through the night
As does the comet. What a splendid ruby!
As red, as if it had drunk all the blood,
That from the first its steel has ever shed.

Kriemhild

There sits the murderer!

Hagen

Whose murd'rer, lady?

Kriemhild

The murd'rer of my husband!

Hagen

Wake her up,
She's walking in a dream. Thy husband lives;
I have been drinking still at night with him,
And warrant thee with this excellent sword
For his security.

Kriemhild

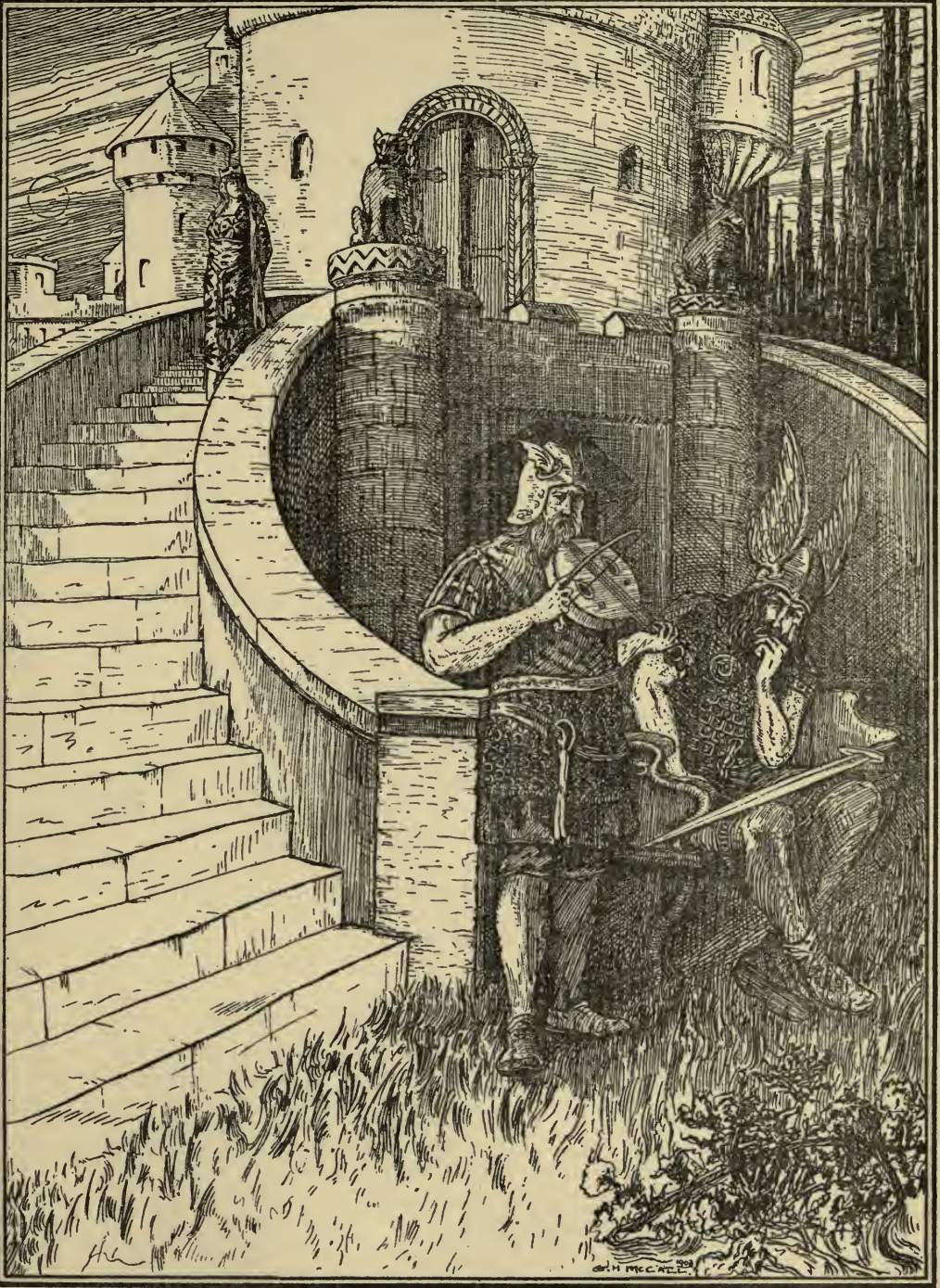
Oh, fie! He knows
Quite well of whom I spoke, and does pretend
He knows it not.

Hagen

Thou dost speak of thy husband,
And that is Etzel—he, whose guest I am.
But thou it's true, the second's got already,
Dost thou yet, in his arms, think of the first?
'Tis true, that one I slew.

Kriemhild

You hear it all!



ACT IV HAGEN : BALMUNG, BE NOT SO SHAMEFACED. SC. III.

Hagen

Was that here unknown then? I can relate it,
The fiddler plays the fiddle perhaps to it!—

[As if he wanted to sing]

In Oden's wood there springs a lively well—

Kriemhild (to the *Huns*)

Now do what pleases you. I ask no more,
If you will end it.

Hagen

Now to bed! To bed!

Thou hast now other duties.

Kriemhild

I shall stifle
Thy mockery at once in thy black blood:
Up! Etzel's stranglers, up! and show it him,
Why I the second marriage bed did enter.

Hagen

[Gets up]

It means then really here attack and murder?
'Tis well!

[Strikes his coat of mail]

The iron cools too much already,
And nought drives out the frost so soon as this.

[Draws the Balmung]

Come on! I do see there more heads than bodies!
Why do you squeeze yourselves about behind?
The helmets' glare betrayed you long ago.

[Strikes out]

They fly! Etzel's not yet with them!—To bed!

Kriemhild

Fie! are you men?

Hagen

No, just a heap of sand
That, indeed, can overwhelm town and country,
But only if the wind does make it fly.

Kriemhild

Have you conquered the world?

Hagen

But through their number!
The million is a power, yet remains
The grain of sand but what it is.

The
Nibelungs

Kriemhild

Hear you

This, and do not avenge it?

Hagen

Go ahead !

And use thy breath, I'll blow into it also.

(to the *Huns*)

Crawl on your stomachs here, and clasp our legs,
As in your battles you're supposed to do.
If we do come to stumble and to stagger,
And perish when we go head over heels,
We shall not cry for help, I swear to you !

Kriemhild

If you are only few, then you also
Need but to share with few !

Hagen

The treasure is
Quite rich enough, and came th'entire world.
It e'en augments itself, there is a ring
With it, that ever does create new gold,
If one—— But no ! Not yet !

(to *Kriemhild*)

Thou hast thyself
Perhaps not known that yet ? You may believe me,
For I have tried it, and will share the secret
With him who will slay me. Only is wanting
The magic wand that can awake the dead !

(to *Kriemhild*)

Thou seest we both of us are of no use,
We cannot shape this dry sand into a ball,
Therefore let us desist.

[Sits down]

Kriemhild (to *Werbel*)

Is that, then, courage ?

Werbel

'Twill yet be otherwise.

Volker

[Pointing with his finger]

A second troop !
The armour gleams in the first morning light,
And once again a fiddler 'tis that leads them.

Have thanks, Kriemhild ; one can see by the music
To what sort of a dance thou didst invite us.

The
Nibelungs

Kriemhild

What dost thou see? If anger overcame me,
Yourselves are by your scorn the cause of it,
And if the guest sleeps not, then will also
Waking be most advisable for the host.

Hagen

[Laughs]

Sends Etzel those?

Kriemhild

No, cur ! 'twas I that did it,
And be quite sure thou wilt not escape me,
If thou also dost see yet the next sun.
I want to go back to my Siegfried's grave,
But have got first to dye my winding sheet,
And that can only be done in thy blood !

Hagen

That's right, Kriemhild ! Why should we two dissemble?
We know each other. But mark this also :
At once after the stag's first masterstroke
The hunter to escape, follows the second,
To draw him down into destruction with it,
And one of both we're sure to succeed in.

SCENE IV

[Gunther in nightgown ; Giselher, Gerenot, etc., follow]

Gunther

What goes on here ?

Kriemhild

The old complainant ever !
I accusation pour on Hagen Tronje,
And do claim judgment now for the last time.

Gunther

Thou dost want judgment, and claim'st it in arms ?

Kriemhild

I want that you step in a ring together,
And swear to speak but true to right and duty,
And that you judge and then fulfil the sentence.

Gunther
That I refuse.

Kriemhild
Then deliver up the man !

Gunther
That I will not.

Kriemhild
Then violence's the word !
But no ; I'll first ask round. My Giselher
And Gerenot, your hands are clean ; you may
Quietly lay them on the murderer,
He cannot charge you with his fellowship !
So step you freely then away from him
And leave him to me !—Who stands now by him,
He does it at his own risk.

Gerenot and Giselher
[Step to Hagen's side with drawn swords]

Kriemhild
How ? You did not
Ride to the wood with him, and did condemn
The deed when it was done, and now you are
Defending it ?

Gunther
His fate is ours also.

Kriemhild
After all !

Giselher
Oh ! sister, stop, how can we do
Differently ?

Kriemhild
But can I ?

Giselher
What hinders thee ?
Eternal shame we'd heap on our head,
Did we forsake the man that stood by us
In need and death.

Kriemhild
That you did long ago !
With shame you're covered, as no race of heroes
Was ever. But I'll lead you to the well
Where you can wash yourselves.

[Strikes Hagen on the breast]
Here it does flow.

Hagen (to *Gunther*)

Well?

Gunther

Truly, thou ought'st to have stay'd at home,
But that is all one now.

Kriemhild

You broke the faith,
When it was highest virtue not a finger's
Width to move from it; do you want to keep it
Now it is shame? Not the relationship,
And the near blood, nor brotherhood of arms,
Nor gratitude for safety from sure fall—
Nothing did move then in your breast for him;
He was but slaughtered like a savage beast,
And who helped not, yet silent was, instead
Of warning and resisting—

(to *Giselher*)

Even thou!
Does all this fall, that weighed no grain of sand
When it did mean compassion with the hero,
Suddenly, as the earth into the scales,
Now that his widow claims the murderer?

(to *Gunther*)

Then thou dost seal the deed a second time,
And by thy youth art no more half excused;

(to *Giselher* and *Gerenot*)

But you join in and answer for it too.

Hagen

Do not forget thyself quite, and thy share!
Thou bear'st the largest fault.

Kriemhild

I?

Hagen

Yes, thyself!

That I did not love Siegfried that is sure,
He neither haply might have loved me, if
I had appeared there in the Netherlands
As he in Worms did with us, with a hand
That playfully all our honours gathered,
And with a look that said: I want them not!
Wear but a bunch in which the smallest leaf
Of death wounds does remind you, and that costs
Thee more of blood than thy entire body

The
Nibelungs

At once contains, and let it not be only
Torn from thee—no, but trodden under foot,
Then kiss thy enemy if thou art able.
But this upon thy head! I would have swallowed
It, that I swear to thee, by my king's life,
How deep the grudge also sat in my heart.
But then there came that sharp fight of the tongues ;
He stood, thyself betrayed it in thine anger,
There all at once, forgetful of vows and duty,
And had King Gunther wanted to forgive him
Then had he too condemned his noble wife.
I deny not that I the death spear threw
With joy, and am rejoicing even yet ;
But 'twas thy hand that handed it to me,
Therefore suffer thyself what there's to suffer.

Kriemhild

Do I not suffer? What could happen to thee
That only half ways would reach to my tortures?
Look at this crown, and then do ask thyself!
It reminds me of a wedding feast, as none
Has ever yet been kept on this wide earth,
Of horror kisses between life and death
Exchanged in the most frightful of all nights,
And of a child that I can never love!
But now my wedding joys will come at last.
As I have suffered, so I want to revel.
I will give nought away, the costs are paid!
Had I a hundred brothers to strike down
To free the way for me towards thy head,
I'd do it also, that the world should know
I broke the faith only for faith's own sake.

[Exit]

SCENE V

Hagen

Now throw yourselves into your clothes, but take
Your weapons, instead of roses, in your hands.

Giselher

Be unconcerned! I hold firmly to thee,
And ne'er she'll harm a hair of mine, also
I've not deserved it from her.

Hagen

She will do it,
Therefore my son I do advise thee ride
Back to Bechlarn! That she will let thee go

I do not doubt, but more expect not from her,
And hurry, for she's right—I hurt her fiercely!

Giselher

Thou gavest many bad advice before,
That is the worst.

[Into the house with Gunther and Gerenot]

SCENE VI

Hagen

Canst thou but understand him?
He ne'er yet spoke one gentle word to me,
Since we returned then from the Oden wood.
And now——

Volker

I've never had a doubt of him,
As dark as might have been his brow. Take heed:
He curses thee, yet does he stand before thee,
He does tread with his heels on to thy toe,
And at the same time catches spears for thee!
A woman's chastity is for her body,
The chastity of man is for his soul;
And rather shows herself a maiden naked
To thee, than such a youth does bare his heart.

Hagen

I am sorry indeed for this young blood!—
For death is standing upright behind us.
I wrap myself up in its deepest shadow,
And but on him falls yet an evening glow.

[Both out]

SCENE VII

[Etzel and Dietrich come]

Dietrich

Thou dost see now to what she did invite them.

Etzel

I do.

Dietrich

To me she ever seemed a coal,
That does await the fresh wind in the ashes.

Etzel
Not so to me.

Dietrich
But didst thou then know nothing?

Etzel
I did! But looked at it with Ruediger's eyes,
And thought a woman's vengeance satisfied
When it has ceased to curse.

Dietrich
And all her tears?
The mourning dress?

Etzel
But I had heard from thee
That 'tis your way to love the enemy,
And with a kiss to thank him for the stroke:
Well, then, I have believed it.

Dietrich
So it should be,
But everyone's not strong enough for it.

Etzel
Also I thought, as she so anxiously
Did urge the messengers should be sent down.
'Twas for her mother's sake; for I do know
She did not part too filially from her,
And, too, that she regrets it.

Dietrich
The mother did
Remain at home, and I do even doubt
Her being invited. But the others sank
The treasure, they after all had dared so much for
By torchlight, in the night ere their departure,
Down in the Rhine, never to see it more.

Etzel
But why did they not also stay at home?
They surely did not fear that I, the fiddlers
With chains and swords would follow?

Dietrich
Sir, they had
Given Kriemhild their word, and were obliged
At last to keep it; for whom nothing binds,
That binds but only all the more, also
Their mind was all too proud to shun the danger,
And to respect advice. Thou'rt used also

To defy death, but thou yet want'st a reason,
Not they! Just as their savage fathers did
Transpierce themselves after a joyous feast
By song and sound, with their own hand, amidst
The circle of their guests, when life's best time
Seemed past—yea, as they in a drunken mood
Did haply mount a ship, and themselves swore
T'return no more, but out on the high seas
In brother-murd'ring fight, one through the other
To fall, and so the last suff'rings of nature
To stamp to be their last and highest deed—
So is the devil, that reigns o'er the blood,
Also yet mighty in them, and they follow
It gladly when it once does boil and fume.

Etzel

Be it, as it may be, thanks for thy going,
For Kriemhild's debtor I would ne'er remain,
And now only I know how stands the reck'ning.

Dietrich

How mean'st thou that?

Etzel

I thought I had done much
That I at once after the wedding night
Abstained from her——

Dietrich

'Twas also much.

Etzel

No, no!
That was yet nought. But surely as I did it,
And surer yet, I shall do more for her,
If she demands it. I swear it before thee!

Dietrich

Thou could'st——

Etzel

Nought what thou wilt condemn, and yet
More, haply, than she does expect from me,
Else long ago she'd tried a diff'rent game.

[While going out]

Yes, yes, Kriemhild; my brothers-in-law I value
Not higher certainly than thou thy brothers,
And if for thee they're only murderers,
How could they something better be for me.

[Both out]

SCENE VIII

[Dome. Many men in armour in the open space. Kriemhild comes with Werbel]

Kriemhild

Hast thou the men been parting from their masters?

Werbel

So far, they're unable to call each other.

Kriemhild

When they do sit together in their hall
And eat, you suddenly attack them, and
Strike them all down.

Werbel

'Tis well, it shall be done.

Kriemhild

[Throws her jewels among the Huns]

There have you earnest money!—Do not strive
For it, there's plenty of it, an' you wish,
It shall yet rain such stones before to-night.

[Joyous cries]

SCENE IX

[Ruediger comes]

Thou giv'st away already half the kingdom?

Kriemhild

But I have kept the best of all for thee.

(to the *Huns*)

Be valiant! With the treasure of the Nieb'lungs
You buy the world, and even if a thousand
Of you remain alive, you need not quarrel,
They would be even then a thousand kings.

[The Huns disperse in groups]

Kriemhild (to *Ruediger*)

Hast thou not something thou want'st fetched from Bechlarn?

Ruediger

Not that I know of!

Kriemhild
Or something to send?

Ruediger
Queen, even less.

Kriemhild
Then cut one of thy locks
Off with thy blade, there's just one creeping out
Beneath thy helmet.

Ruediger
What for?

Kriemhild
That thou should'st
Have something thou canst send.

Ruediger
How! Shall I, then
Return home never more?

Kriemhild
Why so?

Ruediger
Because
Thou dost demand a deed like this from me.
With us our love does that unto the dead,
When comes at last the joiner with the hammer
Who is to nail him down into his chest.

Kriemhild
I know the future not. But take't not so!
Choose Giselher to be thy messenger,
And direct him, that ne'er a flower-garden
He should be riding by without a rose
To pluck for his intended. Is the bunch
Completed, he's to fasten it in my name
On to her breast, and rest himself with her,
Until for me she's plaited from thy lock
A ring. 'Twill show that I deserve the thanks.

Ruediger
He will not go.

Kriemhild
Command him, then, in earnest,
For thou art now his father, he's thy son,
And if he should deny obedience to thee,
As punishment throw him into the tower.

Ruediger

How could I do that?

Kriemhild

Entice him into it,

By stratagem if it cannot be done
By force. Then it is just as good as if
He on the journey were, and ere he can
Manage to free himself, everything's o'er.
The day of judgment is the shortest day!
Do not reply! If dear thy daughter is
Unto thy heart, thou wilt do what I say.
I have made thee a kingly present, for— —
But thou thyself canst haply prophesy!
The bloody comets are drawn up in heaven
Instead of harmless stars, and darkly gleam
Into the world! The good means are exhausted,
Now come the bad ones in their turn, as poison
Is used, when not a med'cine will help more;
And only when my Siegfried's death's avenged
There will exist again misdeeds on earth.
But until then all right is shrouded up
And nature is immersed in deepest sleep.

[Out]

SCENE X

Ruediger

Is that the woman, that I in a sea
Of tears did find? I could feel dread of her,
But now I know the magic that does charm her.
I send off Giselher! I would throw rather
The Tronjer's shield into the fire.

SCENE XI

[The Nibelungs come]

Ruediger

So early here?

Well,

Hagen

It is the time for mass.
And we are all good Christians, as you know.

Volker

[Points at a Hun]

How? Do exist such decked-out people here?
They say with us a Hun does never wash,
Now he e'en runs about as feather bush.

(to *Hagen*)

Thou asked me something.

Hagen

Yea, it goes to dying,
Then must I ask thee: Wilt thou die with me?

Volker

[Again towards the Hun]

But is it, too, a man and not a bird,
That, when one frightens it, does use its wings?

[Throws his spear and pierces him]

After all!—My answer's: Lived I not with thee?

Hagen

Brave, doubly brave!

Werbel (to the *Huns*)

Well? Is it now enough?

[Great tumult]

SCENE XII

[*Etzel* comes in quickly with *Kriemhild* and his kings, and
throws himself between the Huns and the *Niebelungs*]

Etzel

Hold! By mine anger! Weapons down at once!
Who ventures here my guests thus to attack?

Werbel

Sir, 'twas thy guests themselves that did attack:
Look here!

Etzel

That did Sir *Volker* by mistake!

Werbel

Forgive! Here stands the Margrave *Ruediger*—

The
Niebelungs

Etzel

[Turns his back on him]

I greet you, cousins mine! But why still now
In harness?

Hagen

[Half towards Kriemhild]

That's the custom with us, when
We go to feasts. We only like to dance
To the clatt'ring of the swords, and we hear even
The mass but with the shield on our arm.

Etzel

The custom's very strange.

Kriemhild

That one no less,
To pocket quietly the greatest insult,
And to appear as if nothing had happened.
If thou dost thanks expect from me for that,
Thou art mistaken.

Dietrich

I'm to-day presbyter,
Who wants to go to mass must follow me.
[He goes in front. The Niebelungs follow into the dome]

SCENE XIII

Kriemhild

[Seizes Etzel's hand meanwhile]

Step thou aside, sire, very far indeed,
Else they will push thee o'er, and when thou liest
Thou surely canst not swear that thou dost stand.

Etzel

Sir Ruediger, to-day no tournaments.

Kriemhild

Perhaps instead of it a general fast?

Etzel

I pray you to the lords of Denmark tell it,
And Thuering too. The aged Hildebrant
Already knows.

Kriemhild

Sir Ruediger, one thing more :
At Worms there on the Rhine, what swore you to me ?

Ruediger

No service shall be e'er refused to thee.

Kriemhild

Was that done only in your own name, then ?

Etzel

What Ruediger has vowed, that I shall keep.

Kriemhild

Well : Quietly King Gunther turned his back
When Hagen Tronje threw his murd'rer's spear.
If thou hadst turned thy own the same do-day,
Then hadst thou been entirely quits with me ;
But as thou hinder'st me to help myself,
I do demand the murd'rer's head from thee !

Etzel

I'll bring it thee also, if he will not
Lay mine before thy feet.

(to *Ruediger*)

Now go.

Kriemhild

But why yet ?

There always is dispute in tournaments,
And ne'er you'll do your work as easily
As when the wild flames are once flaring up.
I came here, for I thought myself divined :
Dost thou not understand me yet ! Upon it !

Etzel

No, Kriemhild, no ; I do not mean it thus !
As long as he does stay beneath my roof
No hair of his'll be turned—yea, could I even
Kill him by wishes he would be quite safe :
What shall be sacred yet, if not the guest ?

[He signs to Ruediger, who goes out]

SCENE XIV

Kriemhild

So dost thou speak ? Thou'lt get bad thanks for it !
One takes thee for the breaker and disdainer

The
Nibelungs

Of usages and customs, not for their keeper,
And ever wonders yet, if a messenger
From thee appears, that has spoken to thee,
And that yet did not lose his arms and legs.

Etzel

One sees me as I was, not as I am !—
I did ride once the horse, of which at night
In heaven, in the curved and sparkling comet
The tail's now gleaming down to thee. In storm
It carried me along, I did blow over
The thrones, I broke the kingdoms into pieces,
And tied with cords I took the kings with me.
So I did come, throwing all down before me,
And covered with the ashes of a world
To Rome at last, where does your High Priest throne.
Him had I to the last saved for myself ;
I wanted him, with the whole troop of kings,
To be hewn down in his own temple there,
And by this wrathful judgment on all the heads
Of people, by the same hand executed,
To show that truly I'm the lord of lords,
And then to salve my brow with that same blood
Towards which everyone did give his drop !

Kriemhild

That's how I ever have imagined Etzel,
Else never had Sir Ruediger wooed me :
What was it, then, did change him ?

Etzel

'Twas a vision
Of awful sort, that drove me hence from Rome.
I may not tell it ever ; but it did
So strike me, that I did implore the blessing
Of the old man, whose death I'd sworn, and happy
Did praise myself to kiss the foot that bore
The saint.

Kriemhild

What dost thou, then, intend to do
To keep thy vow ?

Etzel

[Points to heaven]
My horse stands there yet saddled,
It's partly out already of its stable,
And if it turned again and hid its head
Deep down in clouds, it happened but for pity
And mercy with the world, that its bare tail
With terror fills. For towns are by its eyes

Lit up, and pestilence and death do reek
Out of its nostrils, and if earth does feel
Its hoofs, it ceases to produce, and trembles.
As soon as I do wave, it's down again,
And gladly in a just cause I would mount it
The second time, and shall make war for thee.
I will avenge thee on thine own, for all
Thy woe, and would have done it long ago,
Hadst thou confided in me ; now they must
Have parted first from us in entire peace.

Kriemhild

But until then they may do whatsoever
They do desire, and pull thy beard for thee,
If it so please them ?

Etzel

Who tells thee that ?

Kriemhild

They stab thy men to death, and thou declar'st
It to be a mistake.

Etzel

They thought themselves
Betrayed, and I had to show them that they
Are not. In this last night very much happened
I cannot praise, and that excuses them.
Else do rely on it, as I the duties
Know of the host, I know those of the guest
Also, and who breaks shamelessly the thread
Of spider's web, that does bind all of us,
If we enter the house, he wears the chain
Of iron ere he thinks it. Be thou easy
And await quietly. I bring to thee
For every cup of wine that they drink here
A can of blood, if also I at present
Catch gnats for them ; only I never will
Tolerate artifice and treachery.

[Out]

SCENE XV

Kriemhild

War! What does war for me! That long ago
I might have kindled! But that were recompense
Instead of punishment. For the butchery
In gloomy forest, the open heroes' fight?

The
Nibelungs

Perhaps e'en victory? How he'd exult
If he could but obtain it, for he has
Ne'er known anything better from his youth!
No, Etzel; murder for murder! The dragon sits
Inside the hole, and if thou wilt not move
Until it has stung thee, as it did me,
Then shall it do so—yes, it shall do so!

[Exit]

SCENE XVI

[Werbel comes by with his troop]

Werbel

They're feasting now! Be quick! Beset the doors!
Who jumps out of the window, breaks his neck!

[The Huns cheer and knock their arms together]

SCENE XVII

[Great Hall. Banquet. Dietrich and Ruediger enter]

Dietrich

Well, Ruediger?

Ruediger

It stands in God's own hand,
But I am hoping yet.

Dietrich

I sit again

By the nixies' fountain, as I did that night,
And hear while half asleep, as in a dream,
The waters rushing and the words are falling,
Till suddenly—what riddle is the world!
If at the wrong time a cloth had but not shifted,
Then I'd know more than e'er a man did know!

Ruediger

A cloth?

Dietrich

It was the bandage round my arm,
For I was kept awake by a fresh wound.
They were having a dialogue down there
And to the centre of the earth, the navel

They seemed to hearken, as I was to them,
And whispered to each other what they heard,
Disputed also who had understood,
And who had not, and murmurs of all sorts.
Of the great sun year, that past human mem'ry
Only in longest pauses does return.
Of the creation fountain—how it boils,
And wells, and overfoams in a million bubbles,
When that appears. Also of a last autumn
That will be breaking up all forms of nature,
And of a spring that will bring better ones.
Of old and new, and how they bloodily strive
Till one succumbs. Of man, that must the strength
Of the lion capture, if the lion's not
To conquer the wit of man. Even of stars
That do alter their place, and change their path,
And even exchange their lights and whereof not!

Ruediger

But what about the cloth! The cloth!

Dietrich

At once!

Thou'lt see it yet. Then did they come to place
And time, and all the more important that
The news became, the lower they did murmur,
And all the greedier became my ear.
When does this year then come? I asked myself,
And did bend down towards the fountain, and
Did hearken. I already heard a number,
And held my breath. But then a sudden scream
Resounded: Here just fell a drop of blood—
One listens! Down! Hush, hush! And all was over.

Ruediger

What drop was this?

Dietrich

It had come from my arm—
I had, leaning on it, the bandage moved,
And thus it was, I lost the best—the key.
But now, I fear, I do not want it more!

SCENE XVIII

[The Niebelungs enter, lead by Iring and Thuering.
Numerous retinue]

Ruediger

They come.

The
Nibelungs

Dietrich

As to a battle.

Ruediger

Take no notice.

Hagen

You live here quietly, Sir Dietrich. How
Pass you the time?

Dietrich

With chase and tournament.

Hagen

Yet, I have not seen much of that to-day.

Dietrich

There is a corpse we have to bury first.

Hagen

Is't he that Volker by mistake did pierce?
When will it be? There we must not be missing,
To show regret and sorrow.

Dietrich

We shall gladly

Let you off.

Hagen

No! we follow.

Dietrich

Hush! The king!

SCENE XIX

[Etzel enters with Kriemhild]

Etzel

Even here in armour?

Hagen

Ever.

Kriemhild

Then your conscience

Demands it so.

Hagen

Thanks, noble hostess; thanks!

Etzel

[Sits down]

An' it please you.

Kriemhild

I pray, sit as you like.

Gunther

Where, then, are all my men ?

Kriemhild

They're well cared for.

Hagen

My brother answers for them.

Etzel

And I answer

For my own cook.

Dietrich

That is the most important.

Hagen

He really performs much. I often heard,
The Hun does hew off from the living ox
A joint, and rides it tender 'neath the saddle——

Etzel

That happens only when he sits on horseback
And when the time's too short to light a fire.
In peace he also for his palate cares,
And not only for the ungrateful stomach.

Hagen

Last evening I did notice that already.
And such a hall with it ! On this wide earth
Does nothing come so near the heavenly arch,
One does look round to seek the planet's dance.

Etzel

That we have not built, it is true. It happened
Strangely to me then on my march : When I
Did enter it, I was entirely blind ;
I spared nothing—no barn, nor temple, village,
Or town ; I threw the fire into it.
But when I did return, then I could see,
And blackened ruins, for their last hour fighting
'Gainst storm and rain, did force from me amazement
That formerly I had refused the building
While yet it stood in its entire glory.

Volker

That's natural. One does look at the dead
Quite differently as at the living one,
And hollows a grave for him with the same sword
Wherewith shortly before one hewed him down.

Etzel

Thus had I too destroyed this miracle,
And cursed my own hands, when I after years
Saw it in ruins again before me. Then
A man stepped near to me, and spake : I did
Build it the first time, and I am quite sure
I shall succeed in it the second time !
I took him, and that's how it stands here now.

SCENE XX

[A pilgrim enters, wanders round the table, and
stops near Hagen]

Pilgrim

I ask you for a loaf and for a stroke—
The bread for the Lord God who created me,
The stroke for my own misdeed.

[Hagen gives him a loaf]

I entreat!

I am so hungry, and I may not eat
Ere I have yet received the stroke from you.

Hagen

How strange!

[Gives him a gentle stroke. Pilgrim goes]

SCENE XXI

Hagen

What was it, then?

Dietrich

What do you think?

Hagen

He's mad?

Dietrich

Not so! It is a haughty duke.

Hagen
How can that be?

Dietrich
A lofty throne stands empty
While he does wander, and a noble woman
Looks out for him.

Hagen
[Laughs]
The world is altering.

Ruediger
One says he once already wander'd home,
And on the threshold he turned back again.

Hagen
Out with the fool ! If he did come again
I'd quickly wake with quite another stroke
The prince in him.

Dietrich
It's something after all !
Ten years are over, and at last he comes
One evening to his castle. Lights are burning ;
He sees his wife, his child ; he lifts the finger
To knock, and suddenly it seizes him
That he is not yet worthy of the joy.
And quietly, while closing the dog's mouth
That greets him, he does creep away again,
Once more to make the weary journey, and
To beg from horse's stable to horse's stable,
And where one treads him under foot, remaining
Until one kisses and embraces him.
It is something after all !

Hagen
[Laughs]
You speak as does
Our chaplain on the Rhine.

Etzel
But where to-day
Remain my fiddlers ?

Kriemhild
There's one here to-day
Who silences all others. Play, then, to us,
Sir Volker.

The
Nibelungs

Volker

Be it so; but tell me only
What you do wish to hear.

Kriemhild

I will, at once!

[She waves to a servant, who goes out]

Giselher

[Lifts his goblet and drinks]

Sister!

Kriemhild

[Pours out her goblet to Ruediger]

Thou hast been too fond of thine hair,
Now thou wilt lose much more!

SCENE XXII

[Otnit is carried in on a golden shield by four knights]

Etzel

Well, that is right!

Kriemhild

See you this child that more crowns does inherit
Than at one time it can eat cherries? Sing,
Then, and do play to his renown and praise.

Etzel

Well, cousins? Is the youngster tall enough
Yet for his years?

Hagen

Do bring him first around
That we can well look at him.

Kriemhild (to *Otnit*)

Pay thy court

Until one pays it to thee.

[Otnit gets taken round; when he comes to Hagen]

Etzel

Well?

Hagen

I'd swear

He lives not long.

Etzel

Is he not strong enough?

Hagen

I am a fairy's child, and have therefrom
The deathly eyes, that frighten so, but also
The second sight. We'll ne'er go to his court.

Kriemhild

Is that the song? There haply speaks thy wish!
You make it good, Sir Volker, tune no longer,
The young king's not yet so particular.

SCENE XXIII

[Dankwart appears in a coat of mail, covered with blood]

Dankwart

Well, brother Hagen, well! You do stay long
At table! Tastes it then so good to-day?
Keep only on, the reckoning is paid!

Gunther

What, then, has happened?

Dankwart

Of all the Burgundians
You did confide to me, there is not one
That does live any more. That's for your wine!

Hagen

And thou? [Gets up and draws. Confusion]

Kriemhild

The child! My child!

Hagen

[Bending over Otnit, to Dankwart]
With blood thou'rt dripping.

Kriemhild

He'll surely kill it!

Dankwart

That's nought but red rain.
[He wipes off the blood]
Thou seest, there come no more, but all the others
Are gone!

The
Nibelungs

Kriemhild

Sir Ruediger! Help!

Hagen

[Cuts off Otnit's head]

Here, mother! Here!—

Dankwart, to the door!

Volker

Here's also yet a hole!

[Dankwart and Volker occupy both doors of the hall]

Hagen

[Jumps on to the table]

Now let us see, who'll be gravedigger here.

Etzel

I!—Follow me!

Dietrich (to *Volker*)

Room for the king!

[Etzel and Kriemhild walk through. Ruediger, Hildebrant, Iring and Thuring follow, as also others join]

Volker

You back?

Etzel

[In the door]

I knew nought of the murder of your servants,
And had punished it so that you yourselves
Would have held back my sword. That I swear to you!
But this also: Now you are set outside
The world's peace, and have lost at the same time
The rights of war. As I did from my desert
Break out, with usages and customs not
Acquainted like to fire and water, which
Stop not before white flags, and which respect
No folded hands, I shall avenge on you
My son, also my wife. You'll leave no more
This hall, and you, Sir Dieterich, shall answer
For it. But what did make the king of Huns
On this earth formerly so terrible,
That you shall see now in its narrow space.

[Exit. General fight]

ACT V

[Before the hall. Fire, burning, and smoke. It is surrounded by Amelungen shooters. To the Hall lead up on both sides wide stairs, that meet in a balcony]

SCENE I

[Hildebrant, Dietrich]

Hildebrant

How long shall then the misery yet last?

Dietrich

So long, I fear, until the last one's fall'n.

Hildebrant

They're mastering the fire. See, but see!
The smoke already swallows the bright flame.

Dietrich

They extinguish, then, with blood.

Hildebrant

Up to the knee, and so can use their helmets
As buckets. They wade in it

SCENE II

[The door of the hall is flung open. Hagen appears]

Hagen

Ugh!

[Turns round]

Let him call who yet lives.

Hildebrant.

The noble Hagen, and he's near to stifling!
He staggers!

The
Nibelungs

Dietrich

Etzel, thou art terrible !
The fearful vision thou didst see in heaven,
That thou dost represent on earth for us.

Hagen

Come, Giselher, here there is some fresh air !

Giselher

[From inside]

I find it not !

Hagen

Then feel against the wall,
And my voice follow.

[Steps partly back into the hall]

Take care not to fall,
That is the dead mount !

[Leads out Giselher]

Giselher

Ah !—that does refresh !
I lay already ! That smoke ! or rather glow !

SCENE III

[Gunther, Dankwart, and Gerenot appear, with Rumolt
in their midst]

Gunther

There is the hole.

Dankwart

Quick ! Quick !

Gerenot

[Breathing deeply]

That's worth something !

Gunther

[To Rumolt, who begins to fall]

Nought helps him any more.

Hagen

Dead ?

Dankwart

Kitchen-master,

**The
Nibelungs**

Up!—Gone!

Giselher

Thirst, thirst!

Hagen

Return then to the tavern,
Where there's no lack of red wine; yet does flow
Many a barrel.

Hildebrant

Do you understand that?

[Points at the death corner]

The empty barrels do lie over there.

Dietrich

Gold help us!

Hagen

It is fortunate the hall
Is arched. For had it lacked this border of bricks,
That did protect us from the copper rain,
Nought could have helped us then.

Gunther

Art thou not roasting

Within thine iron?

Hagen

Stand against the wind,

Now we can do with it.

Gunther

Does it blow yet?

SCENE IV

Kriemhild

[Out of a window]

Well, master-of-arms?

Hildebrant

Shoot!

[The shooters lift their bows]

Hagen

I shall cover you !

[He lifts his shield, which falls from him, and rolls down
the steps]

Inside !

[Calls down]

Look at the shield before you laugh !
It got but weightier, but my arm's not weaker,
For all your spears are sticking fast in it.

[Follows the others]

SCENE V

Hildebrant

I can stand it no more. Will you at last
Not make an end ?

Dietrich

I ? But how could I do that ?

I'm the king's man, and all the more obliged
True to remain, as I of my free will
And out of the desire of my heart
Submitted to him.

Hildebrant

Forget not !

Dietrich

Nought of that.

Hildebrant

The time is past that you have set yourself
For practising obedience, and they live
Your witnesses !

Dietrich

And this you say to-day ?

Hildebrant

To-day, or ne'er. The heroes might be dying
That God till now so wondrously has spared.

Dietrich

Then I am to remain but what I am !
That I did set as token, thou dost know
If I am to wear the crown again, or if

Until my death I am to hold a fief,
And I—I am for both ready alike.

The
Nibelungs

Hildebrant

Well, if *you* will be silent, *I* shall speak !

Dietrich

That thou wilt not! Also thou better'st nothing.

[Lays a hand on his shoulder]

My Hildebrant, if e'er a conflagration
Arises in the house, then does turn back
The servant who was just free from his duty ;
And had he stepped already o'er the threshold,
He takes his holiday dress off again
And throws his bundle down t'help to extinguish,
And I'd retire on the day of judgment !

Hildebrant

Again they throw the dead out of the windows.
Sir, make an end ! The devil's had enough !

Dietrich

E'en also if I would, how were I able ?
Here guilt has into guilt too firmly bit,
As that one could yet say to one of them :
Do thou step back ! They stand alike in right.
If vengeance does not vomit by itself,
And shud'ring turns away from the last crumb,
Then no one will fill more its awful throat.

Hildebrant

[Has gone to the side and comes back]

Now follow our nobles at last also,
After the servants. Most of them can only
Be recognized now by their coat of mail,
The valiant Iring flew in front of them.
Sir, go not there, you could not kiss him now,
His head's entirely charred.

Dietrich

The faithful friend !

[Hagen again becomes visible up there]

Hildebrant

Hagen once more.

SCENE VI

[Kriemhild comes]

Kriemhild

Shoot!

[Hagen disappears again]

How many yet live

In there?

Hildebrant

[Points at the death corner]

Thou seest here how many are dead!

Dietrich

All the Burgundians that came to this country
Are fallen also——

Kriemhild

But yet Hagen lives!

Dietrich

Near seven thousand Huns are lying there——

Kriemhild

And Hagen lives!

Dietrich

The haughty Iring fell.

Kriemhild

And Hagen lives!

Dietrich

The gentle Thuring too,
Irimfried, and Bloedel, and with them the nations.

Kriemhild

And Hagen lives! Now wind up your account,
And were yourselves the last item in it,
Th'entire world cannot pay me for him.

Hildebrant

Fiend!

Kriemhild

Why dost thou scold me? Yet scold me only,
Thou dost hit, what thou surely dost not want to;
For what I am, that I became through those
That you would like to save from punishment.

And if I'm shedding blood, until the earth
Is drowned, and I heap up a mount of corpses
Till one can bury them up on the moon,
So I do heap their guilt, but not mine own.
Show me my likeness only. I do not
Shudder back from it. Every feature does
Accuse the basilisk's in there, not me.
They have re-dyed my thoughts. Am I, then, false
And treacherous? They taught me how t'ensnare
A hero into the trap. And am I deaf
Towards the voice of pity? They were that
When e'en the stone did melt. I am in all
But their reflexion, and who hates the devil
Does not spit at the glass his mask defiles—
Himself he beats and hunts out of the world.

SCENE VII

[Hagen appears again]

Hagen

Is the king here?

Kriemhild

I speak for him. What want you?

Hagen

We want the open fight in open air.

Kriemhild

That I refuse to you, and had it gone
According my own wish, there had been neither
A fight in there—except the one with hunger,
And thirst, and fire!

Dietrich

Here comes the king himself.

SCENE VIII

[Etsel comes]

Hagen

Sir Etsel, did it happen with your will,
That they did set the hall on fire while we
Were binding up our wounds?

The
Nibelungs

Etzel

Have you delivered
Our dead to us? Have you not e'en my child
Refused to me?

Dietrich

Well, that was bad!

Etzel

We're used
Always to burn our dead. If that to you
Has been unknown, so you do know it now.

Hagen

Then you are quits with us! Grant us, then, that
What you cannot refuse, if you will not
The greatest disgrace risk.

Kriemhild

Of all disgrace
The greatest is to lend one's ear to you.
Shoot! Shoot!

Hagen

Wears she the crown?

Etzel

What want you more?
Your fate I laid into a sister's hand.

Kriemhild

As pledges they kept back the dead, t'entice
Also the living ones into it, that
Did not come out of folly.

Etzel

Race for race!
They have extinguished mine, they shall also
Exist no longer.

Kriemhild

What is happ'ning here?
Old Ruediger in fury!

SCENE IX

[Ruediger chases a Hun across the stage and knocks him
to the ground with his fist]

Ruediger

Lie there now,
And vomit once more poison!

Etzel

Ruediger,
You help the enemy? We have of slain
Enough also without you.

Kriemhild

What was it
The man did do?

Ruediger (to Etzel)

Am I nought but a flatt'rer?
Do I snap gifts up, as a dog does meat?
Bear I the sack that has no bottom to it,
And, above all, a firmly glued-on sword?

Etzel

But who says that?

Ruediger

If one is not to say it,
Then scold me not that I pursued the knave:
Into my face he threw all that just now,
While I with tears did think of all the woe
This solstice has been bringing us as present,
And roaring did his band join in with him.

Kriemhild

So did behind him stand an entire band?
Sir Ruediger, the punishment was too hard,
For many, if not all, do think the same.
And it had been a better answer far,
If you had then at once drawn your good sword
And cut into the Niebelungs with it.

Ruediger

I? Did I not bring them myself?

Etzel

Therefore
It just falls to thee to rid us of them.

Ruediger

No, king, that thou dost not demand from me!
Thou barely e'er didst grant, that I should render
The services to thee that I did offer,
And now could'st claim, what I'd have to refuse,—
And did my skin and hair and all depend
On it? I neither will nor can defend them;
But I have led them here on faith and trust,
And if against thee I may not protect them,
So neither can I lend my arm to thee.

The
Nibelungs

Kriemhild

Thou dost as if thou wert yet a free man
And could'st decide, thyself, as thou dost wish !

Ruediger

But can I not ? What hinders me, if I
Lay down my fiefs ?

Kriemhild

What hinders thee ?—Thine oath !
Thou art until thy very latest breath
My man, and canst refuse no service to me :
Well, then, this one it is that I do want.

Ruediger

I cannot say thou liest, and yet it's not
Much better, for another woman did
Demand mine oath and get it, but another
Interprets it to-day.

Etzel

Thou speak'st of faith.
I may well take thee as my witness, that
I know its sacredness. But is't valid here ?
Beyond nature they stand, and use as weapon
What in the abyss quietly did sink,
Before the structure of the world closed up.
They throw to us the mud of th'elements,
That separated did remain down there,
As the ball rounded itself, into it.
They tear out all the nails, and saw the beam
Right through. Then must thou also overleap
Haply the dam, if thou dost want to help.

Kriemhild

'Tis so. The poisoned dagger is the shame
But of the first. The second waves it freely.

Ruediger

It may be so—nay, surely it is so,
I will not quarrel with you. Yet consider :
'Twas I that greeted them with wine and bread
When they had stepped over the Danube frontier,
And did lead them unto your very threshold.
Can I indeed my sword lift against them,
Now that they are in their most cruel need ?
If all the arms that one does count on earth,
In universal rising of all nature
Against them armed themselves ; if knives and scythes

Did gleam and stones were flying, I would feel
Myself yet ever bound, and at the most
A spade were suitable to me.

The
Nibelungs

Etzel

I have
Spared thee also as long as I could do so,
And call thee quite the last.

Ruediger

Compassion! Pity!
What shall I say then, when my son-in-law,
Young Giselher, comes towards me to meet me
And offers me his hand in greeting? And
If my age vanquishes his youth, how shall I
Be ever able to step before my daughter?—

(to *Kriemhild*)

Thee drives the grief for him, that thou hast lost.
Wilt thou entail it on a child that loves
Like thee, and nought committed, and thus kill it?
Thou dost that, if thou makest me the avenger;
For, however the bloody lot may fall,
For her the victor e'er is buried too,
And neither of us may return to her.

Kriemhild

Thou ought'st to have weighed all this well before
The knot was tied. Thou knew'st what thou hadst sworn.

Ruediger

I knew it not. And by the Almighty God
Thou knew'st it less thyself. Th'entire land
Was of thy praises full. In thy own eye
I saw the first tear, and at the same time
Also the last, for thou hadst all the others
Dried with thy gentle hand where'er I trod.
There one did bless thee; no child went to sleep
Without thinking of thee; no cup was emptied,
But thou hadst filled it; not a loaf was broken
And divided, but it came out of thy basket.
How could I think this hour would ever follow!
Ere had I carefully before thy vow
Reserved my own neck for the surety
Of the king's, thy brothers. Would it to thyself
Have e'er entered the mind, when in a circle
Thou saw'st them gathered round thine aged mother
To go into the dome, that thou would'st once
Demand their life? How could, then, I think of it,

And so disdain the noblest and the best
Of all the youths, when he did woo my daughter?

Kriemhild

I do not want their lives even to-day !
The door stands open for them all, bar one :
If they agree to leave their weapons inside
And swear a peace outside, then they are free ;
Go there, and call them now for the last time.

SCENE X

[Giselher appears up on the balcony]

Giselher

Sister, is't thou? Have pity now at last
On my young life.

Kriemhild

Come only down to me !
Who does sit now at meal, and were he ever
So hungry, shall make room for thee, and I
Present to thee the cellar's coolest drink !

Giselher

But I cannot alone.

Kriemhild

Then bring with thee
What Ute cradled, that she not with pain
Must bury that which she did bear with joy.

Giselher

We are yet more.

Kriemhild

Thou dar'st remind me of it ?
Now's past the time for grace, and who yet wants
Mercy, must sever first the Tronjer's head
And show it me !

Giselher

I do regret my word.
[Disappears again]

SCENE XI

The
Nibelungs*Ruediger*

Thou seest !

Kriemhild

That is it just what does revolt me !
 To-day they are unfaithful and to-morrow
 Faithful again : The noblest blood they shed
 Like dirty water, and the hellish froth
 That's boiling in this devil's veins they guard
 As if it were drawn from the holy Grail.
 That's what I neither could suspect when I
 Saw them so with each other quarrelling.
 My convent grave was not quiet enough
 That I should not have heard th'eternal strife :
 Could I think they, that were pois'ning their blood,
 Would coil themselves so closely here together
 As were they hanging on one navel-cord ?
 However ! The fierce murd'rer spake to me
 In bitter mockery there by the coffin :
 Thy Siegfried was not to be separated
 From the dragon, and one strikes the dragon's dead.
 That I do now repeat ! I slay the dragon,
 And with it who does join it and protect it.

Etzel

You did demand the fight when I commanded
 To lock them in with all the silent terrors
 That by degrees crawl out of every wall,
 And grow as does the day.—You did envy
 To hunger its gravedigger's duty, when I
 Transferred it to him, and instead of laughing
 When the lost ones were mocking you from cunning
 Inside to tempt you, you held up your scutcheon
 And forced a "yes" from me, through the first murmur.
 Now fight it out ! I shall not be found wanting
 When it will be my turn, for word is word !

Ruediger

As heavily as I, was never proved ;
 A human being yet, for what I do ;
 And what may leave undone, I do act badly,
 And will be surely blamed for it ; and if I
 Do leave it all, then everyone will blame me.
 [From the hall resound goblets clinking]

Kriemhild

But what is that ? It is like sounds of goblets.

[Hildebrant mounts up]

The
Nibelungs

Methinks they're hearing us! That is the way
Of cheerful ones. They're clanking with their helmets
And knock one 'gainst another.

Hildebrant

But one look
In there and thou art silent! On the dead
They sit and drink their blood!

Kriemhild

But yet they drink!

Hildebrant

Does nothing touch thee, then? Ne'er yet stood men
Together as the Nibelungs do here;
And whate'er they may also have committed,
They've made it good by this faith and this courage
That doubly honours them, if it is so,
As thou didst say!

Ruediger

My lord and king, thou hast
With gifts so overwhelmed me, and remitted
The thanks for it so entirely to me,
That none is so obliged to thee as I am.
Kriemhild, 'tis true I swore that vow to thee,
And I must keep it. I declare that loudly
To be my duty, and find no fault with it.
If you for all that see me kneeling down,
Think of the stag that, in its utmost need,
Also yet turns itself towards its hunter
And does show him the only bloody tear
That on this earth it is allowed to cry,
If it, perhaps compassion wakes in him.
I do not pray for gold and worth of gold;
Not either for my life, or for my body;
Not even for my wife, or for my child;
That all must go. I do now pray to you
For my soul, that is lost, if you do not
Release me from this vow.

(to *Etzel*)

I do not offer
What from itself falls to thee, if the tongue
Of the vassal does only stop, and if
His eye does not sparkle with joy as soon
As thou dost wave: my lands are thine again.

(to *Kriemhild*)

I do not say, if thou dost want my life
Then take it, and if thou demand'st my body
Span me to-morrow then before the plow.

(to both)

I offer more, although this seems to be
All one can offer : if you'll let me off
From using my arm in this fight, it shall
Be to me as if I had it no more.
If one beats me, I'll not defend myself ;
If one insults my wife, I'll not protect her ;
And as an aged man that powerful time
Has parted from his sword in fullest strength
I'll wander as a beggar through the world.

Kriemhild

I'm sorry for thee, but thou must go in !
Dost think *I* saved my soul, when, after a fight
That none compares with, did with Etzel enter
The second bridal bed? Oh ! be thou sure
That the short moment when I was to loosen
My woman's girdle, and did draw it tight
And ever tighter round me, till he, angered,
Did cut it with the dagger—that short moment
Contained more tortures than this hall with all
Its terrors, glow, and fire, with hunger, thirst,
And death. And when at last I conquered in
The fight, and instead of robbing the dagger
And killing, never mind, myself or him,
Bestrode his bed, it was thy vow that gave
Me strength ; it was this day I did hope for,
Also this hour, that must crown it all.
And now it should end like a farce, and I
Would have offered myself as sacrifice,
And should forego the price after it all?
No, no ; and if the entire world I'd have
To bleed, down to the youngest dove, that has
Not left its nest yet, I'd not even shudder
Before that. Therefore, Margrave Ruediger,
Do not consider, *you* must as *I* do,
And if you want to curse, curse only them,
For they do force you, as they're forcing me.

Ruediger

[To his followers]

Then come !

Kriemhild

Your hand first.

Ruediger

When we meet again.

The
Niebelungs

Hildebrant

Sir Dieterich of Bern, now I call you !
Throw your contemptible watchman's spear aside
And interfere as does become a king.
Backward yet, Ruediger, he may and can,
For seven years he entered Etzel's service
And those are o'er, it concerned but a vow.
Who'll not believe me, I'll bring witnesses.

Etzel

Thy word suffices.

Dietrich

[Who had raised the swear fingers while Hildebrant spoke]

It was so, my king,
But my old master-of-arms does not yet know
That I have quietly sworn it anew
While he did speak, and this time until death.

Hildebrant

[Moves out of Ruediger's way]

Then draw ! But give me yet for the last time
Your hand, for it will never happen more,
May you now vanquish, or if you may fall.

Ruediger

Sir Etzel, I commend to you my wife
And child, and also those poor land expelled ;
For what yourself have largely done for me
In my small way I've imitated you.

SCENE XII

[Hagen and the Niebelungs look out as Ruediger mounts up
with his followers]

Giselher

There'll yet be peace. Do you see? Ruediger !

Hagen

It only means the last and hardest fight.
Now shall destroy themselves, who love each other.

Giselher

Think'st thou ?

Hagen

Came reconciliation e'er in iron ?
Needs one the mail-coat to embrace each other ;

Are kisses e'er collected with the sword ;
And takes one all one's men as witnesses ?

The
Nibelungs

Giselher

We all exchanged our weapons in Bechlarn,
I do wear his, as he wears mine, and that
Does only happen all over the world
If one is ne'er to fight each other again.

Hagen

That does not count here. Grasp each other's hands,
And wish yourselves good night. We're at the goal.

Giselher

[Goes to meet Ruediger]

Welcome to thee !

Ruediger

I am deaf!—Music! Music!

[Loud music]

Hagen

Had I but got a shield !

Ruediger

Thou lack'st a shield?

Thou never shalt in want be of a shield,
Here is mine own for thee.

[Gives Hagen his shield, while Hildebrant gives him his own]

Music! Music!

Knock 'gainst the mail-coats, rattle with the spears,
For now I have been hearing my last word !

[Enters the hall with his followers. Fight]

SCENE XIII

Etzel

Bring me the helmet !

Hildebrant

[Looking into the hall, makes a fist at Kriemhild]

Thou ! Thou !

Kriemhild

Who has fallen ?

Hildebrant

Thy brother Gerenot.

The
Niebelungs

Kriemhild

By his own will.

Hildebrant

What light is this, that is so blinding me?
I see no more!—The Balmung!—Hagen steps
But in a sea of sparks, where he does hit;
In all the rainbow colours they do dance
Around him, and so catch the eyes, that one
Has got to close them. That's a sword indeed!
It strikes the deepest wounds, and does make them
Invisible but through the flash. Now does
The mower stop. How stands it? He has mowed!
But very few stalks lift their heads yet up!
Giselher also——

Kriemhild

What is it with him?

Hildebrant

He lies.

Kriemhild

He lies? Well, then, it is all o'er.

Hildebrant

Death has got breath again, and it breaks out
Anew. How Ruediger does rage! He keeps
The vow as truly as if he did like it,
But he's already now alone!

Kriemhild

Then help!

Hildebrant

The Niebelungs one must slay without me!—
Dankwart, thou'rt leaning idly in the corner,
Instead of doing now thy duty. Dost thou
Not see that Volker falls?—Ah! a good reason
He's got, for 'tis the wall that keeps him upright
And not his foot that carried him through a thousand
Hard fights!—Oh, God!

Kriemhild

What is't?

Hildebrant

Breast 'gainst breast!

Kriemhild

Who?

Hildebrant
Ruediger and the Tronjer !

Kriemhild

Shame and death !

Hildebrant

The curse save to thyself ! They were both blind
With spattered blood, and were feeling about,
But not to fall.

Kriemhild

Then I do pardon it.

Hildebrant

Now they do wipe their eyes and shake themselves
Like divers, kiss each other, and—— Dost thou
Want more, go up, and look in there thyself.

Kriemhild

What could there be yet that would frighten me ?

[Goes up]

Hagen

[Meets her when she has gone half-way up the stairs]

The Margrave Ruediger begs for his grave !

Etzel

[Grasps the helmet a servant offers him]

Now it's my turn, and none shall hold me more !

Dietrich

It is my own, the king comes last of all !

[Goes into the hall]

Hildebrant

Praise to the Lord and thanks ! The earth's whole strength
In two parts was divided among us.
The one was shared but among all the millions,
The other one Dietrich got quite alone.

SCENE XIV

Dietrich

[Brings Hagen and Gunther bound]

Here are they !

A Hun
[Comes near]

Kriemhild

Hagen Tronje,
Where is the treasure? I ask that not for me;
I ask it for this man, t'whom it belongs.

Hagen

When I the treasure sank, I had to swear
Ne'er to betray it to any human soul
As long as one of my own kings yet lives.

Kriemhild

[Secretly to the Hun]

Canst thou use yet thy sword? Well, then, go in
And hew down the imprisoned king and bring
His head to me.

Hun

[Nods and goes]

The one that is most guilty
Of Ute's sons shall not be left behind;
It were a mockery on this last judgment!

Hun

[Returns with Gunther's head]

Kriemhild

[Points at it]

Know'st thou this head? Now speak, where is the treasure?

Hagen

That is the end! As I have always thought it!

[Claps his hands]

Demon, I have again outwitted thee.
Now is the place known but to God and me,
And thou wilt not be told by either of us.

Kriemhild

Then, Balmung, render me now thy last service!

[Tears the Balmung from his side and slays him without his
resisting]

Hildebrant

Comes here the devil then yet before death?
Back into hell!

[He slays Kriemhild]

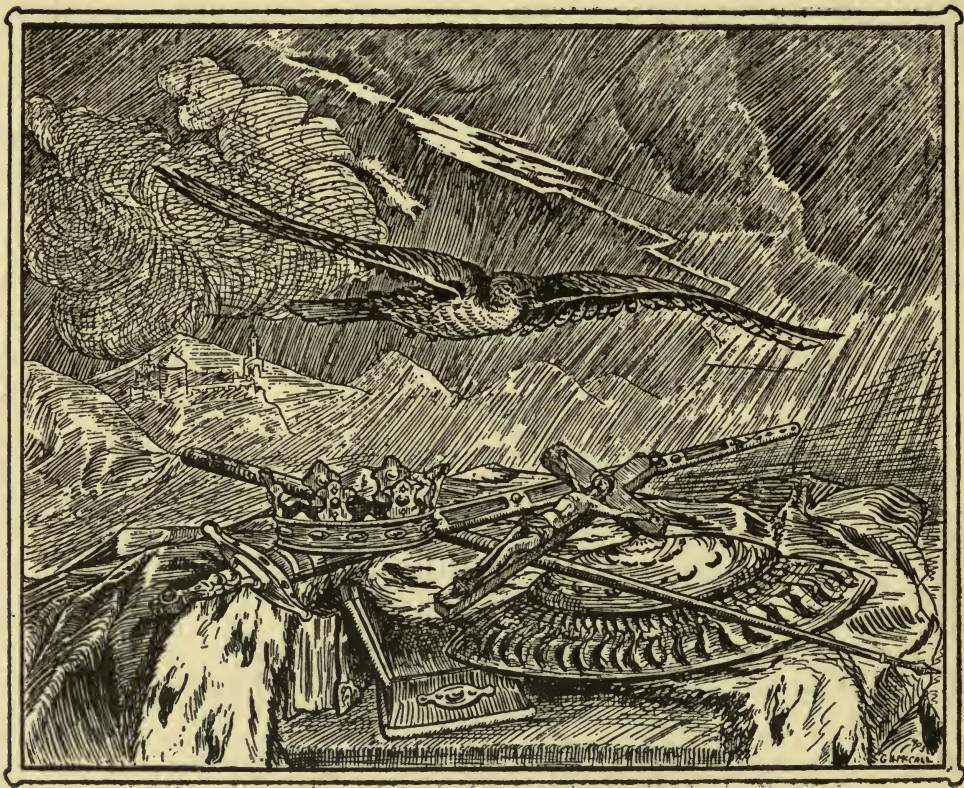
The
Nibelungs

Dietrich
Hildebrant!

Hildebrant
Yes, 'tis I.

Etzel
Now I should judge—avenge—and rivers new
Guide to the sea of blood,—but it nauseates me,
I can no more,—the weight's too heavy for me—
Sir Dietrich, take away from me my crowns
And drag the world on further on your back—

Dietrich
In the Name of Him who on the cross did die!



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